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**DECODING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES:  
INTERPRETIVE TRAILS AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO PROMOTE  
PRESERVATION INITIATIVES**

Alison Leigh McDowell

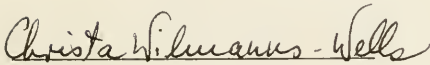
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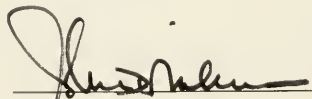
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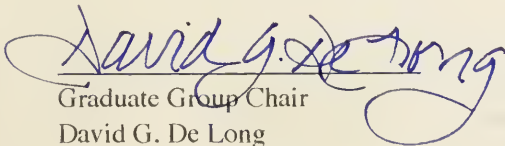
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## Introduction

Heritage corridors have become increasingly important vehicles for historic interpretation in this country during the past decade. Throughout the nation, towns are organizing at the regional level in order to promote their historic resources. Efforts are being made towards developing programs that promote distinct regional characters. Community officials hope that encouraging visitors to experience the unique elements of their local landscapes will enable their towns to tap into the flow of tourism dollars. The Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor in southeastern Pennsylvania exemplifies this trend. The project is currently in the planning stage and, when complete, will establish a network linking historic sites from Philadelphia to Pottsville.

People will be able to travel through the corridor either by automobile within the existing road system or by foot or bicycle on a proposed network of restricted access trails. These trails will provide visitors to the area, as well as local residents, with a valuable chance to experience diverse cultural landscapes first hand. Among these landscapes is the Pickering Valley corridor in Chester county, which provides the case study for this thesis. The trail systems will also provide a novel forum in which to interpret the historic circumstances that contributed to the existing character of these landscapes.

Landscape preservation has gained increasing attention in recent years, and now professionals are looking beyond the management of designed landscapes to address the more nebulous and complex issues which surround vernacular landscapes. The concept of preservation, in the traditional sense, seems almost antithetical in its application to a vital, dynamic landscapes. It should be noted, however, that attitudes towards preservation are continuously evolving, as are land management strategies. Preservationists have come to realize that cultural landscapes are not museums and, in order to fulfill their potential, they must continue to evolve lest they become stagnant. The question is, to what degree



are management and preservation strategies necessary to address increasing development pressures at the local level? Unfortunately, there is no one answer to the question posed, because each community's needs arise from different circumstances. Regulatory measures that are acceptable given the quality of historic and natural resources in one area might stifle the vitality of another. It is my belief that the best way to develop appropriate planning strategies, which take preservation concerns for both the land and the built environment into account, is to encourage the participation of preservation advocacy organizations and cultivate a public that is informed about its historic and natural resources. People must believe that historic preservation can benefit their quality of life, or else the field will not be able to succeed in this new incarnation which goes beyond the confines of limited historic districts and house museums and enters into the realm of regional scope.

I believe that the national success of trail initiatives, both those linked to heritage corridors and those existing independently, provides an advantageous point of departure for preservation organizations that are attempting to educate residents and visitors about the historic context of their surrounding local landscapes. The Rails-to-Trails movement has fostered the conversion of thousands of miles of abandoned railroad rights of way into accessible public trails. Many of the trails are between twenty and forty miles in length. They are used by commuters, families on outings, and exercise enthusiasts. There is a tremendous public audience using these trails for recreation, and yet the potential of incorporating landscape interpretation and information on preservation issues into this experience has thus far remained unrealized.

This thesis will explore the role that rail trails and linear park programs can play in creating a framework for the interpretation of cultural landscapes. The direct access to natural and historic resources provided by these trails has the potential to promote public awareness of the importance of preservation planning measures like open space programs and local historic districts. The concept of linking recreational trails with historic



interpretation of the land and the built environment has not yet been utilized in the realm of preservation. Trail systems represent a powerful vehicle for public education that should be adapted to address preservation initiatives. The integration of concerns for historic resources into long-term community planning objectives must be addressed on many different levels, and I believe that the process of combining interpretation with recreational trails will help achieve that objective.

A significant part of this thesis will involve an analysis of the Pickering Valley corridor in Chester County, Pennsylvania. This area is contained within the boundaries of the Schuylkill River Heritage Park, and there is interest in developing a trail following the route of the former Pickering Valley Railroad which could link a variety of historic resources in the central portion of the county to the larger heritage network. Chapter one will present an analysis of the corridor's current circumstances with respect to physical characteristics, planning issues, and recent heritage tourism proposals. The general interpretive potential of trails and linear parks and the specific benefits of interpreting the physical evidence of this corridor within the context of the former railroad line will be discussed in chapter two. The historic evolution of the corridor in terms of land use and changes in the built environment will be covered in chapters three and four, and the final chapter will detail the specific resources available for developing an interpretation of this area's history within a unifying thematic context.





## Chapter One

### The Pickering Valley Recreational Trail: An Unrealized Vehicle for Historic Interpretation

This chapter will provide current background information on the area I have named the "Pickering Valley corridor." It will include a description of the corridor's boundaries, an overview of existing conditions, the historic resources within it, and why these resources merit an integrated approach to their interpretation. The recreational trail which I propose for this thesis will also be discussed in terms of how it fits into both local planning policies and regional plans for interpretation of the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor. Finally, existing preservation mechanisms will be analyzed with respect to potential improvement.

The Pickering Valley corridor is located in the northeastern quadrant of Chester county, Pennsylvania. The corridor is not a geographical entity, nor does it appear by name on local maps. It is an abstract construct which I have developed to discuss a group of six villages that share a common historic link: Phoenixville, Kimberton, Pikeland, Chester Springs, Anselma, and Byers. Each one of these villages was a stop on the Pickering Valley Railroad, a spur line operated by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Each of the villages along this route experienced a transformation from an agrarian existence to a more complex, commodities-driven economy as a result of the railroad's construction. The railroad, even though it was merely a spur line, fashioned a new identity for these villages. No longer would they be individual settlements, each with their own grist mill serving a limited number of farmers. They had become part of a larger system. It was the Pickering Valley Railroad which brought the towns together ideologically as well as physically. These six villages would become the Pickering Valley cog in southeastern Pennsylvania's machine of natural resource distribution.







And today, even though the corridor's short-lived railroad era is past, the transformation which the Pickering Valley Railroad engendered was so fundamental and significant that it merits consideration and analysis. An interpretation of the proposed corridor within the context of its railroad past provides a valuable starting point from which historic changes in land use can be discussed and demonstrated. My analysis of the historic landscape focuses on changes occurring from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. However, information on the pre-colonial era would also need to be incorporated into any interpretation of a more comprehensive nature.

It is important that information on historic approaches to land use be made available to the public in an accessible format. In order for community residents to support open space measures and consider new approaches to future development, they need to know how natural resources were used in the past and understand how patterns of use helped shape the existing cultural landscape. Only then will communities be able to make informed decisions about the form their relationships with the land will take and to project what the long term consequences of their choices will be.

#### Corridor Boundaries

The term "Pickering Valley corridor" as I have chosen to define it refers to the railroad route, not to the stream of the same name. The Pickering Valley Railroad line ran southwest from Phoenixville, which is situated on the western bank of the Schuylkill River, to Byers, the terminal station. The route wound through the gentle valleys created by the French and Pickering Creeks and passed through the Borough of Phoenixville, East and West Pikeland townships, and Upper Uwchlan township. The villages along the former route still retain their individual identities. They are very close to one another by today's standards, now that the automobile has replaced the horse cart as a measure of travel time. The distance between the villages averages two miles.

The corridor consists of a swath of land approximately two miles wide and twelve miles long which roughly follows the path of Route 113 from Phoenixville to Byers.





Fig. 2 Map of central Phoenixville showing the Phoenix Iron Works and the Pickering Valley Railroad Line.

•Note the configuration of the French Creek as it connects with the dam and the canals.  
 A.R. Witmer, *Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Safe Harbor, PA: Witmer Inc., 1873).





# SCHUYLKILL

Scale 2 1/2 inches to 1 mile

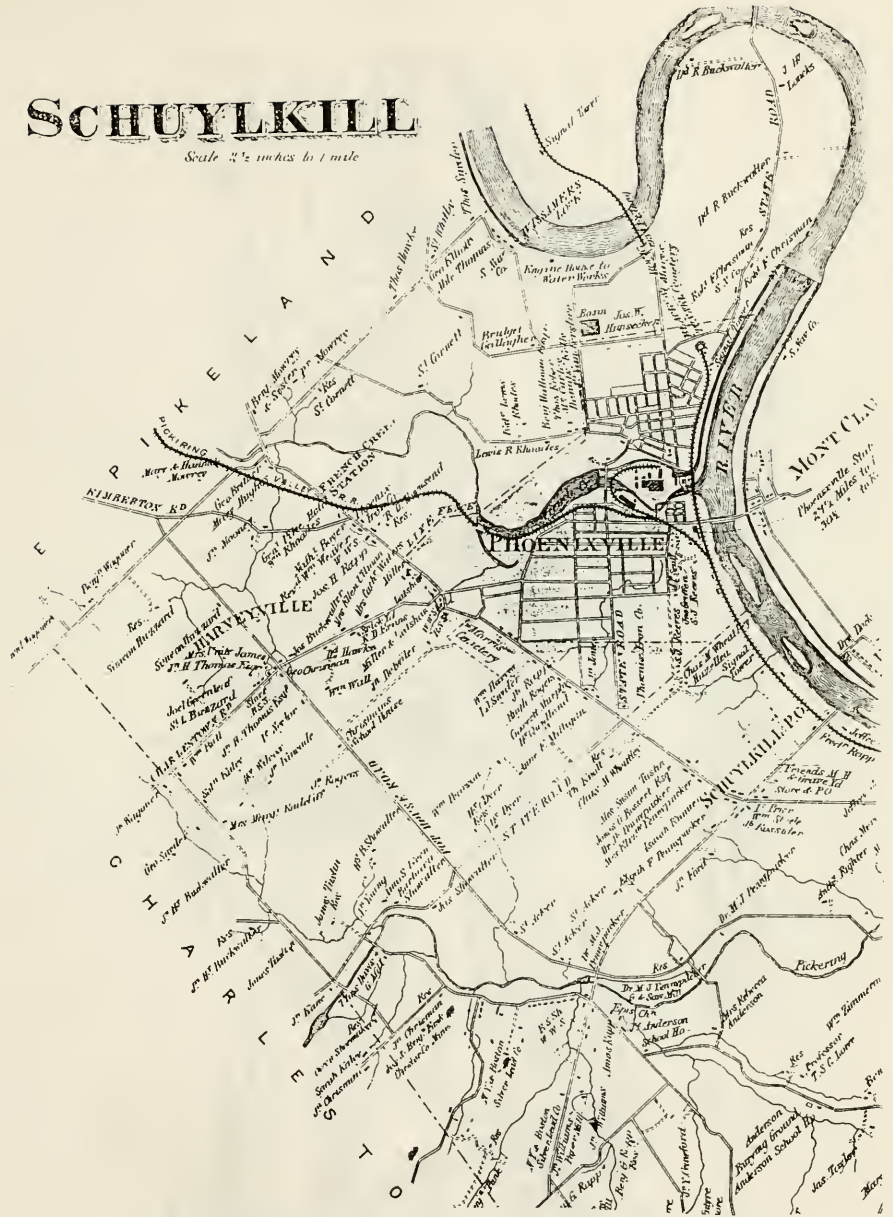


Fig. 3 Map of Schuylkill Township, Chester County, PA with the Borough of Phoenixville.  
 •Note the Pickering Valley Railroad Line as it connects to East Pikeland Township.  
 A.R. Witmer, *Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Safe Harbor, PA: Witmer Inc., 1873).



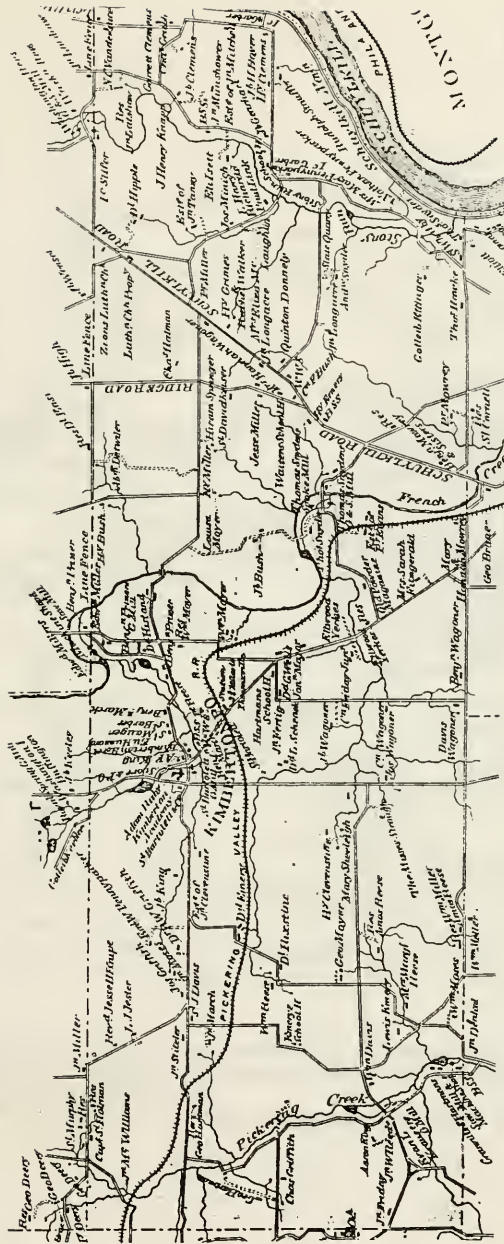


Fig. 4 Map of East Pikeland Township, Chester County, PA with the village of Kimberton.  
 •The Pickering Valley Railroad line continues southwest into West Pikeland Township.  
 A.R. Witmer, *Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Safe Harbor, PA: Witmer Inc., 1873).



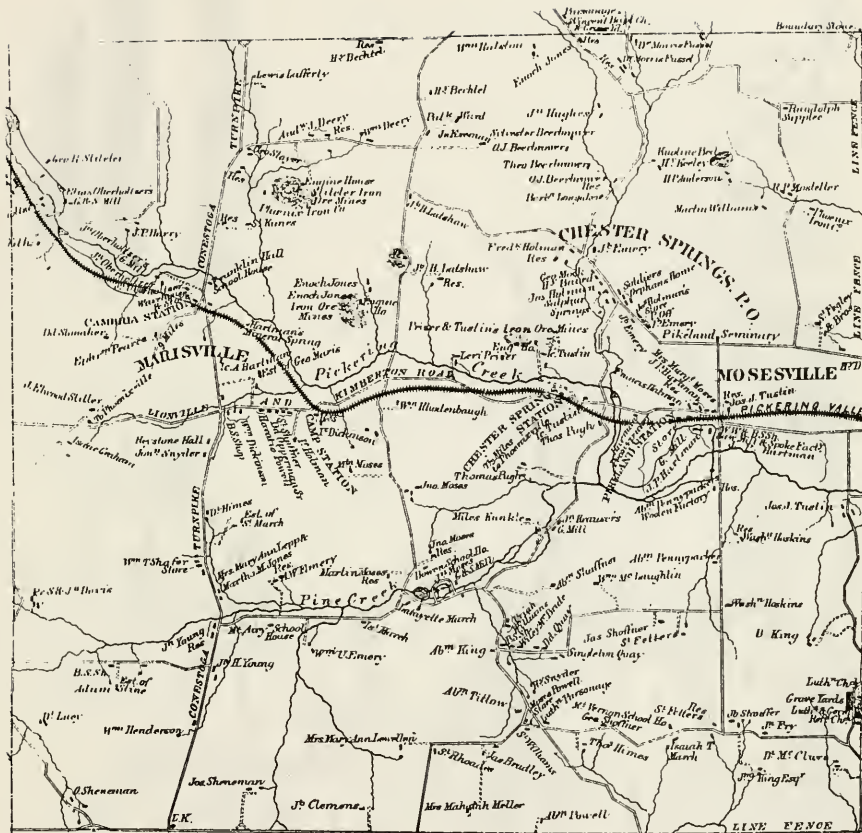


Fig. 5 Map of West Pikeland Township, Chester County, PA with the villages of Mossville (also known as Pikeland), Chester Springs (also known as Yellow Springs), and Cambria Station (later known as Anselma Station). A.R. Witmer, *Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Safe Harbor, PA: Witmer Inc., 1873).











The French and Pickering Creeks provided this area with a sense of continuity long before the construction of a railroad was ever considered. Local topography had shaped transportation routes as they evolved from muddy roads, to a railroad line, and now an even faster highway, Route 113. These transportation routes unified the area and affected the way in which local residents perceived their surroundings. In a recent interview Lucie Windolph, who grew up in the southern part of West Pikeland township, said that she had never been to West Chester ( five miles distant) until after she went away to school as a teenager. Even though her home was equidistant from Phoenixville and West Chester, her family always traveled along the Pickering Valley / Route 113 path when conducting errands.<sup>1</sup>

Route 113 took the place of the Pickering Valley Railroad as the major transportation artery through the area. It continues to maintain the link that was forged between these villages by its predecessor and upholds the sense of continuity within the corridor. In terms of the recreation potential of a bike / pedestrian path through this corridor, I feel that its boundaries could be legitimately extended to include an additional two or three miles on either end. This extension would enable the trail to unite two major regional parks, Marsh Creek State Park and Valley Forge National Park and, consequently, would provide access to a large established pool of visitors.

#### Existing Physical Character

The shape of the land in the corridor has undergone considerable change over the course of several generations. Today much of the open meadow and fields that once surrounded these villages has been reclaimed by second and third generation growth trees.<sup>2</sup> The sledding hill of Sarah Walton's youth, located behind the Yellow Springs

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Walton and Lucie Windolph, interview at Historic Yellow Springs, Chester County, PA, 13 February 1995.

<sup>2</sup> This physical transformation can be seen in a comparison of photographs of fields during the first quarter of this century with those today. An interview with Sarah Walton and Lucie Windolph who grew up in West Pikeland during the 1920's confirmed the fact that many of the rolling meadows which characterized this region of dairy farms are today overgrown and unrecognizable.



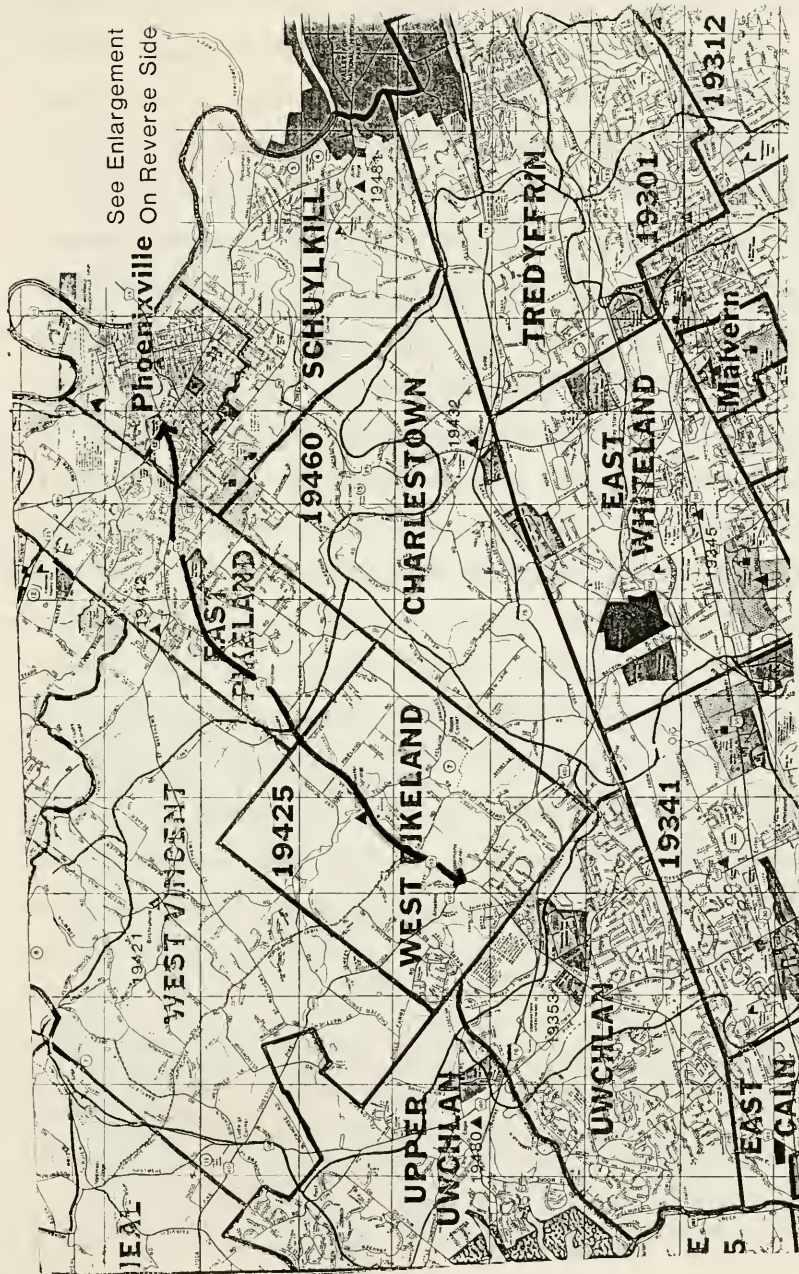


Fig. 7 Current map of the Pickering Valley Corridor from Phoenixville to Eagle.  
 •Note the way in which Route 113 parallels the earlier route of the Railroad up to Route 401.  
 Alfred D. Patton, Inc., Chester County, PA *Street and Road Map Zip Code Edition* (Doylestown, PA: Alfred D. Patton, Inc., n.d.).



complex, has become a thicket, and the nearby pond, where she remembers skating as a child, has disappeared.<sup>3</sup> Agriculture is still practiced to a limited extent with concentrations in the northern and western portions of West Pikeland township.<sup>4</sup> Some of the old dairy farms have been re-made into gentlemen's farms. Nevertheless, there are still considerable tracts of land where the horizons are not obscured by tract housing, and the streams pass through fields that have not changed dramatically over the past century. The Pickering Valley is a vital landscape, and so it will continue to change. Therefore, it is time to take stock of the layers of history which are still discernible at present and take the opportunity to tell the story while the evidence remains intact.

The inexorable westward expansion of the Philadelphia metropolitan area has brought planning issues to the fore in Chester county. Over 30,000 acres of active farm land were developed during the five-year period between 1982 and 1987.<sup>5</sup> In 1985 alone, over 12,000 housing units were approved for development.<sup>6</sup> In order to develop the groundwork from which long-term planning decisions could be made, the county funded the creation of updated comprehensive planning documents for each of the townships in the corridor through its Heritage Park and Open Space Municipal Grant Program.<sup>7</sup> Each of the townships within the Pickering Valley corridor, as well as 64 of the 73 total municipalities in the county, have now completed these studies.<sup>8</sup> These documents will be used to guide development and should prove to be useful in establishing a balance between preservation of existing cultural and natural resources and the long term needs of the community. The plans deal not only with issues of open space, wetlands conservation,

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<sup>3</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates, "West Pikeland Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan," [16 December 1992] (Chester County Planning Commission, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 19.

<sup>5</sup> "Chester County Open Space, Recreation, and Agricultural Preservation Program" [n.d.] (Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates, West Pikeland, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Chester County Open Space, Recreation, and Agricultural Preservation Program" [n.d.] (Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 7.







General View of Chester Springs, from the South, April 28, 1917.

Fig. 8

"General View of Chester Springs from the South, April 28, 1917."

•Note the vast open meadows in the areas around the buildings of the Yellow Springs resort. Most of the land is no longer cultivated, and the hill in the background is now covered with mature trees.

"9th Annual Historic Commemoration of the Chester County Historical Society at Chester Springs on Saturday October 7, 1916," *Bulletins of the Chester County Historical Society 1916-1932*, Newsletter, p.4, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 9

View of hill behind Yellow Springs resort in 1994  
Photograph by the author, 1995.





and preservation of cultural resources, but also address local recreation needs. It is my belief that the creation of a linear park system following the former railroad route along the French and Pickering Creeks would serve each of these purposes by utilizing land whose development is already restricted for environmental reasons, and create a recreational resource for the public benefit.

The introduction of major automobile transportation routes like the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which has an exit near Byers, and the newly opened route 422 which passes near Phoenixville, has spurred development on either end of the corridor. Phoenixville is much larger than the other five villages. It is an independent borough which has a centralized, urban character. The town has weathered considerable economic difficulty associated with the decline of the Phoenix Iron Company, which built the Borough and had sustained it for over a century. Once Route 422 opened, however, new residents settled in developments outside the town in East Pikeland. This rising suburban population has created a market for strip shopping centers. Now that these shopping areas have been constructed, their existence will in turn support continuing development across the township. The open space study cites this situation as a potential problem for small privately-owned businesses in the village of Kimberton.<sup>9</sup>

The village of Eagle which is situated adjacent to Byers on the other end of the corridor has been overwhelmed by traffic from Route 100 which connects West Chester and Pottstown. The fact that there is an exit of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at Route 100 intensifies the problem. Office parks, light industrial complexes, and a multitude of housing developments have sprung up in the past two decades. The area has been made very attractive by the proximity of major transportation arteries and the marketing of the lake front property near the Marsh Creek reservoir. This development has practically eliminated the former village character of Eagle. The focal point of the village has been

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<sup>9</sup> "East Pikeland Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan" [n.d.] (Chester County Department of Planning, West Chester, PA), 2-5.





Fig. 10 Farm on Hare's Hill Road, East Pikeland Township, Chester County, PA.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 11 Intersection in front of the Eagle Tavern in Upper Uwchlan Township at Route 100 and Little Conestoga Road.  
•Note the small size of the lot on which the tavern sits and the fact that Route 100 is scheduled for widening.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



and continues to be the Eagle Tavern which was founded at this important crossroads. The 150 year old tavern continues to assert its presence between Little Conestoga Pike and Route 100, but it is slowly being consumed by them. Road widening programs have compressed the lot, upon which it sits, into a small sliver. The traffic which once brought prosperity is now a threat to the very town it created. Byers' advantageous position, slightly west of Route 100 on Byers Road, has buffered this onslaught to a degree, but the village remains quite vulnerable to future development.

The central section of the corridor including much of West Pikeland and the western half of East Pikeland has continued to maintain a considerably lower population density. The open space plan for West Pikeland Township characterizes the area as follows: "Although more residential development has occurred over the past decade than in the previous three decades combined, West Pikeland continues to be characterized as a rural agricultural community."<sup>10</sup> It is these areas, where the continuum of agricultural practice has not been severed, that will be instrumental to the interpretation of the history of this corridor. A recreational trail would provide a useful forum where the public could have a chance to learn how to read a landscape and see the physical evidence of man's past relationship with the land. This evidence could take the form of a ruined mill foundation and its adjoining rices or the second-growth forest in the midst of a former field. However, the landscape interpretation would be even more effective and meaningful to visitors if it could be linked to ongoing activities that bridge the gulf between past and present.<sup>11</sup> Farms that continue to be actively cultivated offer this type of bridge.

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<sup>10</sup>Thomas Comitta Associates, West Pikeland, 19.

<sup>11</sup> According to West Pikeland's Open Space Plan, the majority of woodlands in the township are less than sixty years old and date roughly to the era when the railroad was abandoned. Photographs of the Yellow Springs Spa from the first decade of this century with its open fields and tree-lined drives present a distinct contrast to the tangled groves that have grown up in the intervening years. Thomas Comitta Associates, "West Pikeland Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan." [16 December 1992] (Chester County Planning Commission, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 40.



## Township Profiles

The Borough of Phoenixville has a population of approximately 15,000 people and covers 2,200 acres of land.<sup>12</sup> It is bordered by Schuylkill township to the south and the east and East Pikeland township to the north. It is an urban environment with a history of heavy industry. When the Phoenix Steel Company failed in the 1970's and 1980's, many local residents lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector. Now, local employment is concentrated in administrative and service sector positions. The average annual household income and median housing values have fallen below the Chester county average and are considerably lower than those in the western end of this corridor.<sup>13</sup>

The Borough is seeking to revitalize itself with the help of state funds tied to the Schuylkill River Heritage Park project.<sup>14</sup> Local residents hope to capitalize on the tourist potential of the Borough's historic industrial infrastructure and its natural resources. The Borough's open space study expressly points out the potential benefit offered by its large amount of water frontage along the Schuylkill River, the French Creek, the Phoenix Iron Canal, and Stoney Run:

The recreational, aesthetic, and ultimately the commercial value of this water frontage to the Borough is immense. One hundred years ago, its commercial value would have been measured from an industrial standpoint. Today its value lies in its uses as a recreational, environmental and aesthetic resource.<sup>15</sup>

Plans to convert the area along the banks of the French Creek, where the Phoenix Iron Complex once stood, into a greenway with bike trails will be a major initiative in this process of converting industrial sites into recreational resources.<sup>16</sup>

The boundary with East Pikeland township creates the northern border of Phoenixville Borough. The village of Kimberton hosts East Pikeland township's sole post

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<sup>12</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, "Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan for the Borough of Phoenixville," [December 1993] (Borough Hall, Phoenixville, PA, photocopy), III-2.

<sup>13</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, III-26.

<sup>14</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, III-23 and V-28.

<sup>15</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, V-28.

<sup>16</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, VII-3.





office. It is located in an historic grist mill in the town center. For decades the township remained in the shadow of its industrial neighbor, but new suburban development in the region has injected a new sense of vigor into that community. According to the township's Open Space, Environmental and Recreation Plan:

The completion of the Pottstown Expressway, recent commercial / industrial development in the King of Prussia area, the planned Chestmont spur, and the influences of Philadelphia and intermediate points are expected to become more evident. Development pressures in East Pikeland will continue to increase.<sup>17</sup>

Few new residents are taking up the agricultural occupations that long characterized this area. Instead, the majority of adult workers are employees in local business and service sector jobs with mid-sized regional companies.<sup>18</sup> The single-family detached house is one of the more prominent features which is being rapidly introduced onto long abandoned fields. As development spreads, the preservation of open space and recreational areas will become critical, if a high quality of life for these residents is to be maintained.<sup>19</sup>

Some planners see greenways as an answer to this problem of congestion:

In East Pikeland township, where there are no sidewalks, and where walking along the main roads may be dangerous, greenways provide the means for pedestrians to move about the community. Greenways may connect or pass through urbanized and commercially developed areas, as well as natural areas.<sup>20</sup>

A linear trail through the area along the French Creek near the Continental Powderworks site and stretching across towards Kimberton could become a major component of a recreational plan, since the heaviest concentration of population and new development is in the central portion of the township along the French Creek basin. Also, the population in the area is rather young with 36.3% of residents under the age of 18.<sup>21</sup> Young, active families need recreational outlets, and an interpretive trail would provide the opportunity

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<sup>17</sup> "Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan for East Pikeland Township, Chester County, PA" [n.d.] (No author given, located in Chester County Planning Office, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 2-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-2.



in the area is rather young with 36.3% of residents under the age of 18.<sup>21</sup> Young, active families need recreational outlets, and an interpretive trail would provide the opportunity for new residents to bond with their adopted community and learn to appreciate its rich historical legacy.

The township of West Pikeland adjoins East Pikeland township and is situated to its southwest. It is square in shape and covers an area of ten miles. The main village in the township is Yellow Springs which has its own post office. The total population for the township in 1990 was 2,323 people, less than one fifth that of the Borough of Phoenixville.<sup>22</sup> While the area supports relatively few commercial enterprises, many residents commute to managerial or office positions within the region.<sup>23</sup> Over the course of the last twenty years, many of the once active farms have been subdivided and developed, and the population has grown.<sup>24</sup> The population density was once so low, that the local, one room schoolhouse accommodated area children until the mid-1950's. Now, the building has been turned into an art gallery, and the children are sent to the elementary school in Eagle. As with East Pikeland, the population is well educated with 94.3% of residents having graduated from high school and 55% having graduated from college. The median housing value of \$257,900 is over one hundred thousand dollars above the average housing valuation for the entire county. The township appears to have a relatively stable economic base and is not seeking commercial revitalization.

Upper Uwchlan is the last of the four townships through which the Pickering Valley Railroad line once passed. Within its boundaries are the twin villages of Eagle and Byers, which are situated less than a mile from one another in the vicinity of busy Route 100. While development in the area around the Pikelands has been dominated by residential construction, proximity to transportation routes and easy access to the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3-2.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Comitita Associates, West Pikeland, 89.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Comitita Associates, West Pikeland, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.



Pennsylvania Turnpike has drawn a mixture of light and heavy industry to the Upper Uwchlan area. This situation is compounded by the fact that there is also development pressure fueling the construction of additional housing near Marsh Creek State Park. The 1990 population of 4,396 people is projected to increase by 2,400 in the next fifteen years.<sup>25</sup> This area, characterized as rural until the mid-1970's, is currently facing a multitude of comprehensive planning decisions.

The profile of the population in Upper Uwchlan is similar to those of East and West Pikeland townships: a large percentage of young people, a well-educated adult population with the majority (95.4%) having graduated from high school and nearly half (47.7%) holding college degrees, many commute to jobs within the region, they live in single-family detached houses with substantial yards, and the median household income and housing value is well above the county average.<sup>26</sup> It is likely that these people chose to live in the Pickering Valley area for reasons beyond those of mere convenience. Newcomers were probably attracted by the area's rural character which is shaped by the open spaces, streams, and the many aspects of history which are embedded within these townships. New residents, as well as old, deserve the chance to explore their community with new eyes, and be made aware of hidden treasures that merit consideration and in many cases protection.

### Interpretive Potential of the Resources

The interpretive potential for this corridor is exceedingly rich. Up to the present time, development has come gradually. There was ample space for new construction. The new took its place beside the old, not on top of it, thereby leaving the corridor a diverse artifactual legacy. The fact that the corridor is rather compact, containing six distinct hamlets within the space of a mere twelve miles, would be a major asset in the

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates, "Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan: Upper Uwchlan Township, Chester County, PA" [December 7, 1992] (Chester County Planning Office, West Chester, PA, photocopy), 16.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates, Upper Uwchlan, 16.



development of any interpretive program. The entire length of the corridor can be readily experienced in the course of a full day's bike ride or an afternoon drive. This provides the opportunity for making a variety of informative comparisons among the villages.

The cultural landscape of a given area is defined by a community's relationship to a particular site. These six communities were founded for different reasons, and their developmental patterns varied as a consequence. Phoenixville's siting along the Schuylkill River, its proximity to transportation routes by canal and rail, and the availability of iron ore from plantations in the northern part of the county, resulted in the creation of an early nineteenth century industrial town. Its size and industrial nature offers an obvious foil for the rural character of the other five villages.

Kimberton's fate was shaped by Emmor Kimber's vision of establishing a major educational institution, Kimberton Academy, in that locality. The Quaker girls boarding school gained considerable renown during the first half of the nineteenth century. The town enjoyed a location that was considered healthy, had ready access to regional transportation routes, and possessed fertile soil. The school's operational needs were met by harvesting produce from the surrounding limestone-enriched soil. Kimberton's grist mill and tavern were magnets for local residents, and the boarding school attracted regional visitors coming to see their daughters. The village's early economic development was tied to that institution and was later superseded by its role as a cargo station on the Pickering Valley Railroad.

Yellow Springs developed as an eighteenth and early nineteenth century entertainment complex, offering baths, cures, and promenades. It presented a selection of leisure pursuits for the enjoyment of wealthy travelers. Its carefully designed grounds and architecture imbued the site with a cultured ambiance unmatched by any other nearby village. It relied on outside investments brought in by tourists to support itself.

Chester Springs, to the south of the resort, developed in the mid-nineteenth century as a distribution point for locally excavated minerals. During the early part of the





century, local iron deposits were mined, and shipments were hauled to Phoenixville by horse-drawn ore teams. During the last quarter of the century, however, graphite mining replaced iron mining. The ore was shipped via the new Pickering Valley spur line.

Anselma, the next village on the railroad's route, developed as a quintessential miller's hamlet. The focal point was the Lightfoot mill complex. It was the smallest of the villages, never developing much beyond the crossroads stage. Eventually it gained recognition as a railroad stop and even successfully petitioned for an officially-sanctioned post office, a local status symbol.

The terminal station, Byers, was a town built by the railroad. Until the location of the line's last station was decided in 1871, only open pastures and one or two farmsteads stood on the site. The town's economy was based on shipping local natural resources including milk, produce, and mineral ore to the Philadelphia markets. Byers was dominated by platforms, depots, turntables, and coal chutes. It was unlike the other villages on the line, because the railroad station was centrally located, instead of being relegated to the edge of town.

Except for the town of Phoenixville, the villages, when viewed superficially, appear to be very similar. They are all small hamlets with less than twenty structures and simple vernacular housing stock. The fields in the intervening sections reveal their agricultural heritage. They could easily be dismissed as simply another quaint section of the Chester county countryside offering pleasing vistas and a wholesome backdrop for an afternoon's outing. A comprehensive program of interpretation incorporated into a recreation trail through this corridor could point out that while there are certain common elements in these townscapes, each has a distinct past and represents a distinct type. The corridor contains an industrial town, a institutional village, a resort, a small mining center, a mill hamlet, and a railroad town. Some of these sites, like the Lightfoot Mill at Anselma and the Yellow Springs resort have eighteenth century origins. Other villages, like Phoenixville and Kimberton, gained stature in the first half of the nineteenth century.





Fig. 12 Mid-19th century housing for Phoenix Iron workers on Mill Street in the Borough of Phoenixville.  
• Note the proximity of the row of homes to the foundry.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 13 Late-19th century workers' housing in Byers, PA.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



The remaining two towns, Chester Springs and Byers, emerged in the late nineteenth century with the advent of the railroad era. Not only are a wide spectrum of town types represented within the corridor, but a continuous span of a century and a half of development is illustrated as well. In addition to the variety of town types, there are also numerous building types clustered in this strip of land. Signs installed along the trail could point out differences in residential housing types by contrasting company-built mill workers' row housing near the former iron works in Phoenixville with the centrally placed farmstead structures with dependencies situated in the northern section of West Pikeland township, or by comparing these to the small, frame, twin speculative housing built in Byers during the beginning of the graphite boom.

There are mills at Rapp's Dam, Kimberton, and Anselma that show different manifestations of water-powered industry. They could be compared to the one remaining building of the Phoenix Iron Works, a renown nineteenth century iron mill located on the banks of the French Creek in Phoenixville. This foundry, a massive structure with "Richardsonian Romanesque" aspirations, is a lone survivor. A discussion could be raised concerning the changing nature of industry as it evolved in the nineteenth century from small concerns in rural settings into larger, urban complexes.<sup>27</sup> There is also the issue of the way in which industry shaped the land. Many of the mills retain their dams, races (now dry), and mill ponds. The area around the mouth of the French Creek in Phoenixville exhibits these same types of interventions, but on a much grander scale: the iron canal that was constructed off the Schuylkill River, the dams, and the creek banks which were first straightened and then eventually narrowed by slag deposits.<sup>28</sup>

There were two historic institutions in the corridor, Kimberton Academy and the Soldiers Orphans School, which was located in the former Yellow Springs resort complex. Many of the buildings which once comprised the Kimberton Academy were

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<sup>27</sup> See: Thomas Bender, *Towards An Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), Chapter II "Agrarianism and Industrialism."

<sup>28</sup> Simone and Jaffe - Landscape Architects, V-29.







Fig. 14 Rapp's Dam mill race on the French Creek in East Pikeland Township, now abandoned. Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 15 The mouth of the French Creek near its junction with the Schuylkill River at the site of the former Phoenix Iron Works. Photograph by the author, 1994.







Fig. 16 Historic Yellow Springs resort complex at Art School and Yellow Springs Road.  
Photograph by author, 1994.



Fig. 17 General Pike Tavern which stood at the intersection of Route 23 and Route 113.  
Demolished during the month of November 1994.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



destroyed for a housing development several decades ago, however, a portion of one of the buildings survives, and there are historic images at the Chester County Historical Society showing the whole complex. The Soldiers Orphans School site remains and is managed by the Historic Yellow Springs Foundation. It would be useful to compare these two examples of large, multiple-occupancy buildings and examine the ways in which natural resources were adapted to support the daily operations of the sites: food collection and preparation, hygiene, and heating.

There are also a number of taverns along the route, although a significant one, the 150+ year old General Pike Inn located near the intersection of Routes 23 and 113 which formerly served as the Ironsides train station, was torn down several months ago. Several former taverns continue to operate as local restaurants, but they only offer food and entertainment - no lodging. Among these are the Kimberton Inn, the Inn at Yellow Springs, and the Eagle Tavern. This building type provides a vehicle for discussing the important role of taverns as community centers and places of information exchange in rural townships. Indeed the local tavern was often the place where political meetings were held and ballots were collected.

Much later, when the railroad came through, stations became the hubs of local activity. The station house held the local telegraph and later a pay phone, farmers gathered at the platforms in the busy dawn to load their milk on the inbound train, and depots and general stores offered agricultural commodities necessary to run a farm. There are a number of surviving railroad structures in the corridor, but many of the functional yet fragile, frame structures succumbed to the elements. Others were removed when Route 113 was straightened and rerouted during the 1960's.<sup>29</sup> The creamery at the former Byers Station was only torn down this past summer, its replacement - a dental clinic. Still, both Chester Springs and Pikeland retain their original feed stores, and Kimberton's 1918 station still stands. Other non-architectural elements like trestles, graded

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<sup>29</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.



embankments, and under-track cow crossings survive and contribute to the overall picture of this railroad era.

With the exception of Historic Yellow Springs, none of these resources are currently being interpreted. As years progress, twentieth century elements in the form of gas stations and convenience stores creep into the gaps between these sites and obscure their relationship to one another. Signage or a published guide keyed to points along the proposed recreational trail would provide information and enable people to sift through the layers of history within the corridor and uncover some of its most basic themes. These themes might include: manners of transportation, leisure opportunities, methods of education, and patterns of land use - be they related to manufacturing, milling, mining, agriculture, or recreation.

Some of the resources, like the Lightfoot Mill and Historic Yellow Springs, retain a strong enough context that they can be interpreted on their own, however, many of the other resources do not. They may not be able to carry the burden of an entire program. Alone they do not attract attention, but when included within a larger picture, they can make a significant contribution towards developing an understanding of the area's evolution. In this case, an interpretation of the whole network of historic resources within the corridor would be greater than those same resources analyzed in isolation. Each resource acts as a foil for the next one down the line, thereby creating a rich educational experience for the visitor on the trail.

Fortunately, there is ample material from which to develop a comprehensive interpretation at the Chester County Historical Society in West Chester. These materials include primary resources, photographs and ephemera files. It should also be noted that there are a number of local preservation groups and not for profit organizations that could serve as partners in developing this type of program. Among these are the historic commissions in each of the townships, the Phoenixville Area Historical Society, the French and Pickering Trust who own the Lightfoot Mill, and Historic Yellow Springs.



The Pickering Valley corridor is a living landscape; it is not frozen in time like a staged exhibit in Williamsburg. There are fragments of history in varying degrees of public visibility, however, they need interpretation to be understood. It would be a true misfortune to let the history of such a well-documented area fall by the wayside, when it could prove to be an invaluable opportunity to teach people about reading their local landscapes and offer them a stake in preserving the richness of these landscapes for the future.

### The Trail's Place in Local and Regional Planning

As the field of preservation has developed, its scope has broadened to include not only landmark structures, but their settings - both designed and vernacular. Understanding the fundamental structures of cultural landscapes like the Pickering Valley corridor has attracted professional attention, and studies of these areas have increasingly gained respect as legitimate exercises. In some cases, such as certain cultural landscapes under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, strict programs of historic resource management are developed. This was the case with the hamlet of Everett, Ohio, in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. "The Conceptual Design for Everett Village" was created by a cadre of professionals wishing to establish guidelines for the maintenance of the town's historic character.<sup>30</sup> Included in the plan were restrictions placed on allowable population densities which would limit it to the period of 1880-1935, the period of the town's historic significance.

No independent, vital community would ever accept this degree of restrictive preservation measures. Most communities involved in heritage tourism ventures want to maintain their historic resources and capitalize on their unique qualities to create a "sense of place," while still retaining their freedom to evolve and develop as a modern towns. It is this approach that is currently being applied to the development of a regional tourist

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<sup>30</sup> See: Jeffrey Winstel, "The Unincorporated Hamlet: A Vanishing Aspect of the Rural Landscape," *CRM Bulletin* 17 (1994): 25.





base in southeastern Pennsylvania at the state level and, more specifically, to Chester county and the Pickering Valley corridor at the local level.

The creation of a recreational trail along the former route of the Pickering Valley Railroad line would be only one small component in a much larger system of regional cultural resources contained within the proposed Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor. Once complete, this Pennsylvania State Heritage Park will link historic resources in Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties to tell the story of the Schuylkill River. The theme "River of Revolutions" is now in its final stage of development, and input offered by a wide scope of professionals will soon result in the completion of a ten year master plan. This plan will guide regional participants as they fulfill their roles explicating varied aspects of this theme: social and cultural revolution, political revolution, industrial revolution, transportation revolution, and environmental revolution.<sup>31</sup>

According to the proposed Management Action Plan (MAP), the overall interpretive goal for the heritage park concept is to "create the physical framework and thematic context within which to present the many and varied stories that comprise the history of the Schuylkill River Corridor as a connected system."<sup>32</sup> The theme associated with the Chester county section of this corridor is "Iron Comes of Age," although Montgomery county's theme "Miles of Mills" seems equally applicable to the Pickering Valley area.<sup>33</sup> The fact that five out of Chester county's twelve potential resources, which are listed in the corridor's *Feasibility Executive Summary*, lie along the route of the Pickering Valley Railroad indicates the significance of the Pickering Valley area to the

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<sup>31</sup> Schuylkill River Greenway Association, *Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor: Feasibility Study Executive Summary* (Wyomissing, PA: Schuylkill River Greenway Association, 1992), 4.

<sup>32</sup> "Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Management Action Plan: Interpretation - Statement of Interpretive Goals" (Chester County, PA Department of Parks and Recreation, 1993), 1.

<sup>33</sup> "Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Management Action Plan: Interpretive Plan - Representative Programs" (Chester County, PA Department of Parks and Recreation, 1993), 4, 9.



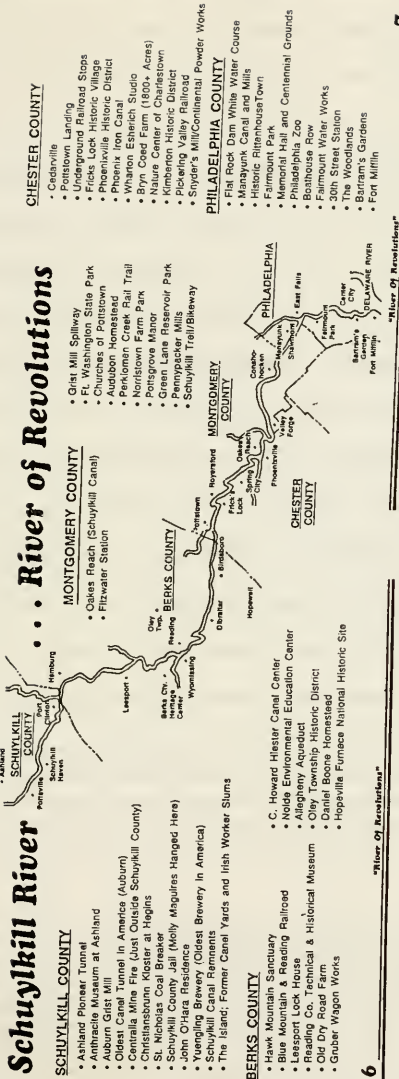


Fig. 18 Proposed Route of the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor.  
 •Note the section between Valley Forge and Phoenixville and the Pickering Valley sites included on the Chester County list of resources.  
 Schuylkill River Greenway Association, *Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor: Feasibility Study Executive Summary* (Wyomissing, PA: Schuylkill River Greenway Association, 1992), 6-7.



comprehensive interpretive program.<sup>34</sup> These resources include: the Phoenixville Historic District, the Phoenix Iron Canal, the Kimberton Historic District, the Pickering Valley Railroad, and Snyder's Mill / Continental Powder Works.<sup>35</sup>

The creation of a spur recreational trail to interpret resources along the former Pickering Valley Railroad route would fulfill several of the MAP's interpretive goals. First, it would "utilize the linking theme of transportation (cycling and pedestrian) to develop interpretive programs that cross township and county lines." Second, it would provide a system within which "residents *and* visitors could encounter the corridor, find their way within it, and understand its context and significance," while also creating a program within "an area with clusters of historic and cultural resources." And third, it would provide an enjoyable means of "involving residents in local history."<sup>36</sup>

One of the major incentives for developing a heritage area is the potential for attracting increased tourist revenues which can help spur economic revitalization. Studies conducted on the economic impact of heritage tourism in southwestern Pennsylvania have shown that the second largest tourist draw for that region, after outdoor activities (golf and skiing), is historic site visitation.<sup>37</sup> According to this study:

Historical sites and museums represented a major growth center for tourism over the past ten years.... An expenditure profile of \$50 per day was established for non-regional Heritage visitors and \$40 per day for other historic sites.... The completion and final development of 16 Heritage Centers by the year 2003 should attract a non-regional attendance

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<sup>34</sup> Schuylkill River Greenway Association, *Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor: Feasibility Study Executive Summary* (Wyomissing, PA: Schuylkill River Greenway Association, 1992), 7.

<sup>35</sup> According to Jane Davidson, Chester County Heritage Preservation Coordinator, a 20 acre tract on land on which the remnants of the powder mill sit have been deeded over to East Pikeland Township by the State of Pennsylvania for development as a community recreation facility and historic site. The site has been horribly neglected over the years, and is currently an informal dumping area. Information collected during an interview on 13 March 1995.

<sup>36</sup> "Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Management Action Plan: Interpretation - Statement of Interpretive Goals" (Chester County, PA Department of Parks and Recreation, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission, "Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism in Southwestern Pennsylvania - Regional Report 1993" (The School of Forest Economics, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, photocopy) 29, 33.



of 1.4 million visitor days to these Centers. This would generate expenditures in excess of \$100 million.<sup>38</sup>

Heritage tourism capitalizes on current trends in tourism which indicate that people are taking shorter vacations (between 3 and 5 days) and are more likely to travel regionally rather than plan a major cross-country excursion.<sup>39</sup>

The goal of economic development will be of paramount importance to the town of Phoenixville whose economic base has been undermined over the past two decades. This town is targeted for development as one of the "four major visitor receptors" within the corridor, which will provide orientation information to visitors. The other three centers are Philadelphia, Reading, and Pottsville.<sup>40</sup> An analysis of Chester county's current tourism activities has shown that, while there is a concentration of attractions in the southern and eastern parts of the county and an annual visitation of over 2,000,000 for Valley Forge National Park, little of that activity carries over to the Phoenixville area.<sup>41</sup> It is believed that the heritage corridor will help overcome these boundaries and create a more broadly diversified tourist base. A recreational trail in the Pickering Valley corridor would be an additional attraction that could draw visitors away from the major sites in Valley Forge and the Brandywine area and bring them into central Chester county. Projected annual tourist revenues for the completed corridor are well over \$1,000,000 for Chester county alone, and associated development is expected to create nearly 4,600 jobs in the county.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission, 41-2.

<sup>39</sup> Tom Herrin Associates, "Adventure Arkansas: The Realities and the Possibilities of Heritage Tourism" (Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas, April 1989), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum, James Nelson Kise to Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Steering Committee, 3 June 1994, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation.

<sup>41</sup> Schutz and Williams - Development Marketing Direct Response, "The Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor - Cultural Landscapes: Current Tourism Activities" ( Submitted to the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Task Force as part of the Management Action Plan, 30 December 1993- Made available by Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA), 14, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Jane Davidson, "Cultural Tourism and Economic Development in the Management Action Plan, 1995-2005," March 1995, given on the occasion of the submission of the Management Action Plan for the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor.







Fig. 19 Phoenix Iron Company Foundry on the south bank of the French Creek in the Borough of Phoenixville.  
•It is one of the few surviving structures in this area of the industrial complex. Much of it was leveled during the 1980's.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



The empty acreage along the French Creek where much of the Phoenix Iron Works once stood (now demolished) will be a focal point for this orientation. One of the few surviving remnants of the town's iron history is the c.1875 foundry building which is slated for rehabilitation as a commercial / retail venture. There are also plans to house the orientation center in a portion of this massive structure. According to the MAP, the center would also serve as the main departure point for visiting the so-called "Iron Belt" in Chester county.

The creation of non-vehicular trails to link resources within the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor is given consideration in the MAP. Funding in the form of matching grants from the state is currently being offered at the county level, and it is believed that "trail development and trail improvements will be called for in each phase of the plan's implementation."<sup>43</sup> The backbone for cyclists seeking access to the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor will be the Schuylkill River Trail which, when completed, will run from Philadelphia to Reading and from Hamburg to Frackville.<sup>44</sup> Currently, this trail connects Philadelphia to Valley Forge National Park, and a \$960,000 ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) grant will soon allow it to be extended another 6.5 miles to the outskirts of Phoenixville.<sup>45</sup>

Within the Borough of Phoenixville, Paul Kusko, president of the Phoenixville Iron Canal and Trails Association (PICTA) continues to lobby for the creation of a river front greenway park. In his plan, the Blackrock Silt Basin to the north of the city would become a migratory bird sanctuary, and a network of bike trails passing through some of the former Phoenix Iron Works would connect it with the center of town. Another

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<sup>43</sup>Memorandum, James Nelson Kise to Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Steering Committee, 3 June 1994, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation.

<sup>44</sup> Schuylkill River Greenway Association, "The Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor: Unlocking The Secrets of America's Hidden River" (Special Insert to the PICTA [Phoenixville Iron Canal and Trails Association] Newsletter, Winter 1995), 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Phoenixville Iron Canal and Trail Association (PICTA), "Bikeway Receives Extension Grant" (PICTA News, Winter Edition 1995, Newsletter / Photocopy), 3.



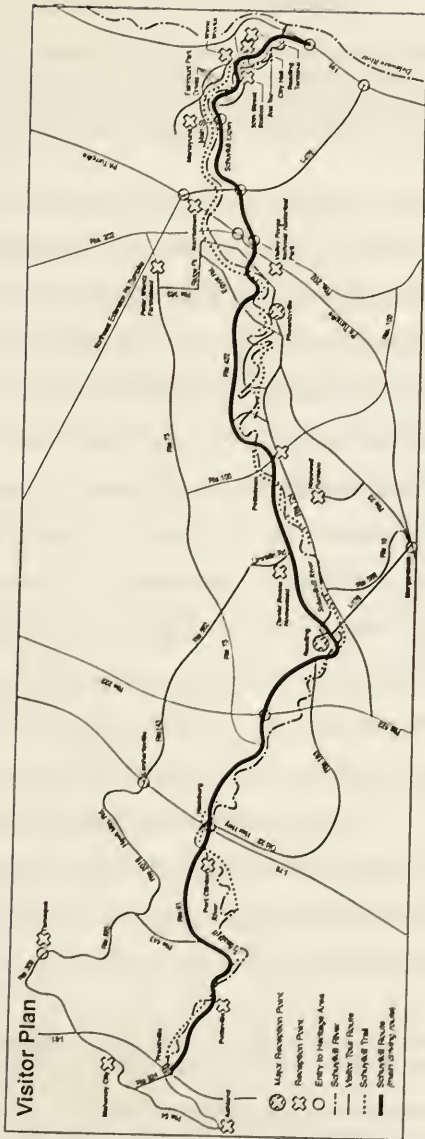


Fig. 20 Map of Schuylkill River Greenway Trail showing its proposed route from Philadelphia to Reading and from Hamburg to Frackville.

•Note the fact that Phoenixville is recognized as a major reception point. Schuylkill River Greenway Association, "The Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor: Unlocking The Secrets of America's Hidden River," (Special Insert to the PICTA [Phoenixville Iron Canal and Trails Association] Newsletter, Winter 1995), 2-3.



proposed bike trail would follow the length of the French Creek. These types of trails have been given considerable support in the MAP:

The secondary priority (after creation of the Schuylkill River Trail) is the establishment of trails along the Schuylkill River's many tributaries. The next priority is the development of tertiary trails to link visitors centers, other trails, historic sites, and other attractions to the river and tributary trails.<sup>46</sup>

A study done by Hammer, Siler, George Associates included a survey of this area noted that, in addition to the 1875 foundry building, there are a number of other iron-related features remaining along the bed of the French Creek including: the superintendent's office, the pump house, the rolling mill complex (which uses Phoenix Iron columns), and the bridge mill shop.<sup>47</sup> PICTA's proposed bike loop would be a perfect setting in which to incorporate historic interpretation of the surrounding cultural landscape (from cultivated land to industry to protected greenway) with recreational offerings. This type of resource would cater not only to visitors, but to local residents as well. Currently, PICTA has informal written and verbal agreements with property owners along nine miles of trails around Phoenixville which allow them to be used for guided hikes and rides. The proposed open space plan for the Borough makes strong recommendations for the purchase of those rights of way and for the expansion of the greenway overlay district to include land around the Chester County Iron Canal and unclassified drainage ways which could serve as trail heads and wildlife corridors.<sup>48</sup>

Linking a localized system of trails to the larger artery of the cross-county Schuylkill River Trail would give cycling visitors to Valley Forge National Park the chance to explore a broader range of cultural landscapes in a safe, enjoyable setting.

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<sup>46</sup> "Management Action Plan: The Schuylkill Heritage Corridor - Unlocking the Secrets of America's Hidden River" [March 1995] (Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA), 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Hammer, Siler, and George Associates, "Economic Impact Evaluation of the Proposed Heritage Corridor"[n.d.] (Submitted to the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Task Force as part of Task 2 of the Management Action Plan, made available by Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Simone and Jaffe Incorporated - Landscape Architects, VII-8,9.





There are close to two million annual visitors to Valley Forge who take advantage of the "self guiding facilities," meaning they either drive through the park (1,725, 855 people) or use the paths for jogging, biking, walking, and horseback riding (208,970).<sup>49</sup> A trail from Phoenixville, the temporary terminus for the Schuylkill River Trail, along the Pickering Valley corridor would likely be a very attractive recreational resource for the latter group, as well as for nearby residents.

Forty-five percent of visitors to Valley Forge are local residents who live in the immediate area and use the park for recreation. It is a popular location for family outings and is heavily used for recreational purposes in the spring and summer.<sup>50</sup> Marsh Creek State Park, located at the western end of the Pickering Valley corridor, is also a major attraction for recreation enthusiasts. The core of Marsh Creek State Park is the reservoir which was created in the 1960's, submerging several intact nineteenth-century milling villages, including Milford Mills. Now, people from throughout the region come here primarily to fish and boat, although those participating in hiking, biking, and horseback riding numbered 63,100 in 1994.<sup>51</sup> The popularity of these two parks indicates that a substantial user base for a recreational trail already exists.

County planners are currently giving greater attention to the recreation trail concept. A major element in the Chester County Open Space, Recreation, and Agricultural Preservation Program is the Open Space County Park Program whose function is to support the acquisition, planning, design, and development of county park land, as well as provide trails and greenways.<sup>52</sup> An earlier study done in 1982 found that the southern and eastern portions of the county had a park land deficit of 800+ acres, and a need for permanent publicly accessible trails was identified. In instances where limited

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<sup>49</sup> Valley Forge National Park. Public Use Report, 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Valley Forge National Park, Statement for Interpretation, 1994, Section 2.3 Analysis of Park Users and Use Patterns, 40-41.

<sup>51</sup> Marsh Creek State Park, Annual Attendance Summary, 1994.

<sup>52</sup> "Chester County Open Space, Recreation, and Agricultural Preservation Program" [n.d] (Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA), 20.



budgets and high property values will not permit townships to purchase large tracts of land for park development, trails offer a viable recreation alternative. A trail's linearity allows it to extend a greater distance than other types of parks, therefore, more people can have ready access to it. Trails also require less intense maintenance than many other kinds of parks.

The Borough of Phoenixville is not the only area interested in the development of recreational trails and greenways as a supplement to existing community parks. Each of the townships within the Pickering Valley corridor has identified possible routes for recreational trails. Among the goals for West Pikeland's Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan are: to create linkages within the area for walking and visual continuity, to identify potential spurs for the existing Horse-Shoe trail which would provide access to the village of Yellow Springs and other points of interest, and to evaluate new trail alignments along the Pickering Creek, Pine Creek and the former Pickering Railroad Bed.<sup>53</sup>

Often times abandoned railroad rights of way are utilized in the creation of linear parks. An example of this is the Struble Trail, opened in 1979, which is located west of the Pickering Valley corridor and follows a branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The paved trail runs north from Downingtown 2.5 miles and ends near the border with Marsh Creek State Park. There are plans to pave the remaining fifteen miles of the path which would then connect Downingtown with Honey Brook.<sup>54</sup> According to Alison Willis of the Chester County Parks Department, the acquisition of another rail-trail is currently being negotiated with Conrail along a corridor from Valley Forge to Downingtown.<sup>55</sup>

There is also a network of informal trails in the county which are maintained by the Chester County Trail Club. The club is independent of government affiliation, and its

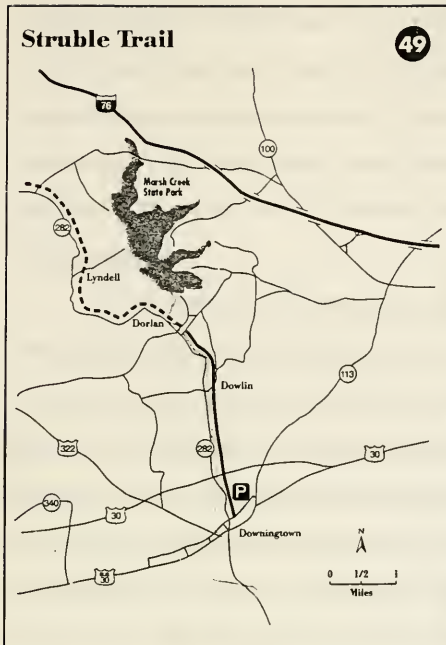
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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates Inc., West Pikeland, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Tom Sexton, Julie Larson, and Bill Metzger, *Pennsylvania's Rail-Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1995), 84.

<sup>55</sup> Alison Willis, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, telephone conversation, 15 February 1995.



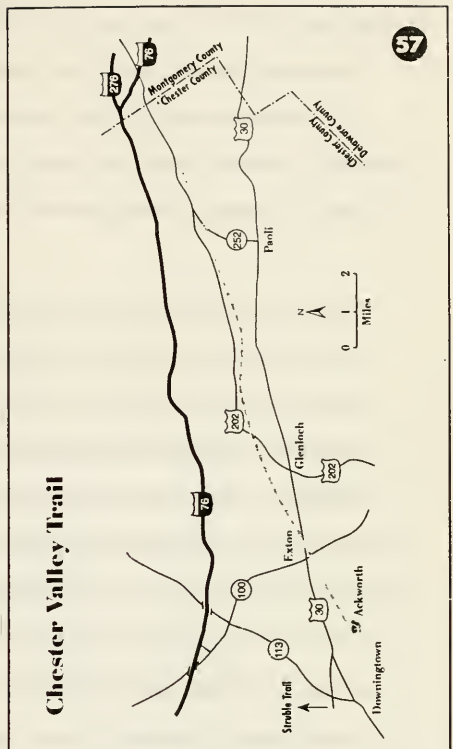


 on certain sections

**Endpoints** Downingtown to Honeybrook  
**Location** Chester County  
**Length** 2.5 miles developed from Downingtown to Uwchlan Township (will be 16 miles when completed)  
**Surface** Asphalt  
**Contact** Robert Folwell  
 Chester County Parks and Recreation Dep't  
 CSC Suite 160  
 601 Westtown Road  
 West Chester, PA 19382-4534  
 (610) 344-6415

Fig. 21 Map of the Struble Trail from Downingtown to a point near Marsh Creek State Park in Upper Uwchlan Township.  
 Tom Sexton, Julie Larison, and Bill Metzger, *Pennsylvania's Rail Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1995), 84-85.

Fig. 22 Map of the proposed Chester Valley Trail that runs roughly parallel to the Pickering Valley Recreational Trail which I have proposed.  
 Tom Sexton, Julie Larison, and Bill Metzger, *Pennsylvania's Rail Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1995), 99.



**Trail Under Development**

**Contact** Bob Folwell  
 Chester County Parks and Recreation Dep't  
 Government Services Center, Suite 160  
 601 Westtown Road  
 West Chester, PA 19382-4534  
 (610) 344-6415



members negotiate informal agreements with local property owners to allow their trails to cross through private land. One of the best known trails is the 138 mile Horse-Shoe Trail which crosses through the county. It begins in Valley Forge and ends at the Appalachian Trail. The route runs along existing roads and through sections of privately held land.<sup>56</sup> The Horse-Shoe Trail intersects the Pickering Valley corridor just west of Chester Springs.

Unfortunately, the Pickering Valley Railroad was abandoned several decades before the concept of Rails-to-Trails was developed, and the rights of way have since reverted to adjacent property owners. Many of the proposed trails for the townships within the Pickering Valley corridor run along existing stream banks in development restricted areas, however, negotiations for their construction will require considerable effort. People are afraid of change and the possibility of losing some form of intangible property rights. They perceive permission to allow trail access as an invitation for crime, when experience has proven just the opposite. Trails, especially in high population areas, are extensively used. Busy trails do not attract a criminal element and, in fact, act as a deterrent.<sup>57</sup> While these preconceptions may make the creation of this trail more challenging, it still has great potential and should be pursued. The Chester County Parks and Recreation Department is intent on expanding the heritage concept beyond the Schuylkill River Corridor to the entire county, and routes such as this one will be instrumental in drawing visitors away from the river.<sup>58</sup> In a recent newsletter, the Parks Department had identified six distinct regions within the county which they hope to develop: the iron and steel region, the Schuylkill River Heritage Park, the Brandywine Battlefield, the country life and agricultural heritage region, the Quaker heritage region,

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<sup>56</sup> Rick Maerker, President of the Chester County Trail Club, telephone conversation, 15 February 1995.

<sup>57</sup> See: Karen-Lee Ryan, and Julie Winterich, eds., *Secrets of Successful Rail Trails: An Acquisition and Organizing Manual for Converting Rails into Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1993).

<sup>58</sup> Jane Davidson and Bill Mineo, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, interview, West Chester, PA, 21 September 1994.





and the Welsh tract.<sup>59</sup> The resources of the Pickering Valley area offer a strong link between the first two regions. According to Jane Davidson, what is initially needed in the creation of these heritage zones is primary resource research and the identification of interpretable components in each area.<sup>60</sup> The research offered in chapters 3 and 4, and the resource survey in chapter 5 fulfill this requirement for the Pickering corridor. The next step would be the acquisition of land.

The trail need not necessarily follow the exact surveyed route of the Pickering Valley Railroad line. It could simply replicate the general passage of the route crossing through the former stops in the villages of Phoenixville, Kimberton, Pikeland, Chester Springs, Anselma, and Byers. The county and townships own parcels of land throughout the area which can be made available for public use, and proper planning should capitalize on these existing resources. Also, interpretation of the corridor is not strictly dependent on the creation of a recreational trail, although I believe that this format would be very successful. An automobile-oriented guide, which would provide the historic context for the corridor and indicate reference points for locating specific sites along the route, could precede the creation of the trail and raise local interest. It would also support the current interest in preserving scenic roads.

Scenic roads accentuate and facilitate visual access to the sense of space which characterizes West Pikeland Township. While that form of access is essentially passive, it is the form most frequently enjoyed by the general populace. Scenic roads provide a close to home opportunity for pleasure driving and sight seeing, which are among the most popular outdoor recreation activities in Pennsylvania.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, "The Nature of Things" (Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, Newsletter, Winter / Spring 1994), 1, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Jane Davidson and Bill Mineo, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, interview, West Chester, PA, 21 September 1994.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Comitta Associates Inc., West Pikeland, 44. A more detailed study on scenic byways can be found in the following thesis: Elizabeth Rogers Brown, "Scenic Byway Designation As A Preservation Tool For Topsfield, Massachusetts" (master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1994).



Such a pamphlet would also continue to complement the pedestrian / bike trail after its completion. It would make this cultural landscape interpretation available to those who cannot access the recreational trail due to time constraints or physical limitations.

#### Existing Preservation Mechanisms in the Pickering Valley Corridor

Another aspect of the heritage park philosophy is to "improve the quality of life in target regions of the state."<sup>62</sup> Quality of life cannot be quantified in strictly financial terms, and for that reason, promoters of the heritage tourism concept work with local officials to insure that projected development does not compromise the natural and cultural resources in these areas. As has been discussed earlier, the Pickering Valley corridor contains valuable cultural resources, many of which have recognized national importance. Within its boundaries are located five historic districts which have been selected for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. These include: Phoenixville Historic District, Kimberton Historic District, Prizer's Mill Historic District, Yellow Springs Historic District, and the Anselma Mill Historic District. Hare's Hill Road Bridge, an iron bridge with a unique wrought-iron, lattice girder design, is listed independently.<sup>63</sup>

While these listings carry a considerable amount of prestige, in actuality they offer very little protection from incompatible alterations or demolition by private owners. The Section 106 process would have been useful, had these districts been in place in the 1960's when Route 113 underwent reconstruction, and could prove beneficial should similar major federal projects be undertaken in the future. However, for now, the Section 106 process does not provide immediate protection from development or demolition by private property owners who are independent of government ties.

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<sup>62</sup> "Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor Management Action Plan: Interpretation - Statement of Interpretive Goals" (Chester County, PA Department of Parks and Recreation, 1993), 1.

<sup>63</sup> William P. Chamberlain, "Historic American Engineering Record Report for Hare's Hill Road Bridge" (National Register Nomination File - Hare's Hill Road Bridge, April 1992, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA, photocopy).



In Pennsylvania the creation of local historic districts at the county, city (except first and second class cities), borough, incorporated town and township level is enabled by Pennsylvania Statute: Title 53, Part 1, Chapter 26, Section 8001-8005.<sup>64</sup> The governing body of a municipality may create a historic district by local ordinance if the district meets with the approval of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. After this authorization is given, an Historic Architectural Review Board is appointed to advise the municipality on the issuance of certificates of appropriateness for alterations to structures within the district. The creation of each new district necessitates the development of a new ordinance with its own specific guidelines. It is a very individualized process.

At present, Phoenixville is the only municipality within the corridor to create a local historic district under this legislation, however, the creation of other districts in East and West Pikeland and Upper Uwchlan townships are being contemplated. Each of the townships currently have an historical commission, and recommendations for the creation of local districts are posed in each of the townships' open space and recreation plans. Unfortunately, preservation concerns have not yet been fully integrated into the comprehensive planning philosophies of these and many other Chester county townships. The task of creating local historic preservation ordinances which will assist in guiding thoughtful development that is sympathetic with existing cultural resources remains unrealized in the three townships. Although Phoenixville is in the process of creating a HARB board to monitor its one state-level district, there are no plans to incorporate a binding preservation ordinance into the Borough's governing policies. Currently, historic commissions in Upper Uwchlan and East Pikeland are in the process of conducting cultural resource inventories. Hopefully, once township officials realize the richness of their historic and cultural resources, there will be greater incentive to create protections

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<sup>64</sup> Pennsylvania Code, *Title 53. Municipal and Quasi-Municipal Corporations, Part 2. General Municipal Law, Chapter 26. Historic Areas, Sites And Buildings (1994)*, sec. 8001-8005, available from Lexus / Nexus on line system. search = code (library), pancode (group file), historic district (search term).



for them. Continued pressure by the preservation community will always be needed, however, to shift local governments from the status quo towards a policy of action.





## Chapter 2

### Approaches to Landscape Interpretation: Now and for the Future

The previous chapter discussed the interpretive potential inherent in the development of a Pickering Valley corridor recreation trail, and how such a proposal would work within the planning framework established by local township officials and those involved in the more comprehensive Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor project. The creation of such a trail would be a significant recreational resource for adjacent communities, and it would also offer a powerful informational tool for preservationists as they attempt to educate local communities about their latent historic resources. This chapter will discuss current philosophies about cultural landscape management from two different perspectives, the National Park Service and those involved in the development of heritage areas. The origins of the Rails-to-Trails movement will be described, and I will present my rationale for how this concept meshes with the objective of creating a broader framework for landscape interpretation.

### Current Approaches to Cultural Landscape Management

As the field of preservation has evolved and matured, the issue of preserving historic context has become increasingly important. Initially, there was a move away from singling out landmark buildings for protection and, the historic district concept took front stage as a preservation planning tool. With this shift came an increased interest in documenting and restoring the historic landscapes that grounded the structures within these districts. During the past decade, the approach to landscape preservation itself has developed a much broader scope. The idea of retaining historic context has moved beyond the restoration of designed landscapes and gardens, which once surrounded high-



style buildings, and has been extended into the realm of vernacular landscapes with rural landscapes receiving notable attention.<sup>1</sup>

With each step away from site-specific landscape policies, towards a more diversified regional approach, comes a new level of complexity. Dealing with larger cultural landscapes can be extremely rewarding due to the richness and variety of resources that may be enclosed within their boundaries. It is this variety, however, that defies attempts to create integrated preservation policies which best suit the unique needs of each historic resource. In his comprehensive article on the protection of rural landscapes, Melnick notes that cultural landscapes are:

... places which facilitate human activities, they are constantly and consistently altered due to changing needs and changing technologies, and they are characteristically in flux. Thus, their "preservation," in the strictest sense, is almost impossible, and probably not even desirable.... There needs to be a recognition, by various people that time has passed, and continues to pass, through these places.<sup>2</sup>

Landscapes can be large, unwieldy things that refuse to fit neatly into any given category. They cross the bounds of physical space and exist within a temporal continuum. In addition, many of the elements that comprise a given cultural landscape change not only with time, but also often cyclically with the seasons. Fieldwork is critical in order to develop an understanding of the historic and current forces at work within any given landscape. The elements within the landscape and the role which they play in characterizing it, must be identified, however, in many cases this proves to be an extremely difficult task. Key landscape components are often obscured over time, either through man's intervention or lack of intervention in the cycle of natural growth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The need to conduct additional studies in "more mundane, everyday landscaping" is put forth by Robert Clous, Georgia's Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer. Richard Clous, "Historic Residential Landscapes in Georgia: The Georgia Living Places Project," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 14.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Z. Melnick, "Protecting Rural Landscapes: Fining Value in the Countryside," *Landscape Journal* 2, no. 2 (1983): 86.

<sup>3</sup> Susan, Buggey, "Managing Cultural Landscapes in the Canadian Park Service," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 23.



In his discussion of fieldwork techniques, Robert Harvey notes that uncovering and interpreting clues in the landscape requires the expertise of many professions (archeologist, botanist, field geologist, geographer, historian, landscape architect, photographer, and soil scientist), and then "even when this expertise is available, the landscape may only reluctantly yield up its true context."<sup>4</sup> While a thorough "reading" of a challenging landscape is probably best left to informed professionals, it is still important that the public have the opportunity to learn to "read" their local landscapes as well. Even if they only grasped the most basic principles, a whole new world of history could be revealed to them along their neighborhood recreation trail, and understanding lays a foundation for future appreciation.

Cultural landscapes are, in a word, dynamic. This dynamism is the force with which landscape preservation specialists must grapple. These preservationists do not have the luxury of dealing with only one structure or aspect of a given structure and analyzing it in an artificially imposed isolation, as is the case with many historic sites. Instead, their efforts must be put towards understanding relationships, because "in a cultural landscape, the individual structure is often regarded as one of many site features and evaluated in the context of the landscape as a whole."<sup>5</sup> The standing challenge is to develop strategies that can subtly manage the one true constant in the landscape - change.<sup>6</sup>

### The Role of the National Park Service

The development of a common methodological approach to cultural landscape analysis has been of paramount importance to the National Park Service, an organization charged with the management of myriad cultural landscapes throughout the country. A major step towards the adoption of a system of common standards will come with the approval of the *Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic*

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<sup>4</sup> Robert R. Harvey, "Fieldwork Techniques as an Aid in Reading the Cultural Landscape," *APT Bulletin* 22, no. 1-2 (1990): 132, 140.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Gilbert, "NPS Pacific Northwest Region Cultural Landscape Inventory," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 16.

<sup>6</sup> Melnick, "Protecting Rural Landscapes," 89.



*Landscapes* which has been in development for several years. These standards will assist in the creation of park management plans and help other organizations formulate informed policies for interpreting and managing the landscapes under their protection.<sup>7</sup>

The Secretary of the Interior's guidelines outline a four-step process which can assist in the creation of an appropriate preservation plan: 1) historical research, 2) inventory and documentation of existing conditions, 3) site analysis, and 4) treatment selection.<sup>8</sup> The nature of the landscape in question often shapes the methodology used to develop the resource inventory. The complexity of landscape analysis requires considerable flexibility on the part of researchers in order to obtain the information necessary to apply an appropriate treatment.

A past thematic issue of the National Park Service's *CRM Bulletin* contains a wealth of articles addressing different approaches taken by a selection of historic landscape sites in addressing the first two steps - research and inventory.<sup>9</sup> These steps are of extreme importance, because if there are not enough resources to save a landscape, documentation can at least preserve its significance on paper.<sup>10</sup> In Georgia, the State Historic Preservation Office undertook a project to formulate a range of typologies for residential landscape forms which involved field surveys and data collection of historic land uses.<sup>11</sup> In another case, a HABS project was initiated to document small parks or "reservations" existing in Washington, DC which were unique survivors of L'Enfant's original eighteenth century plan for the city.<sup>12</sup> The Pacific Northwest Regional Office of the National Park Service is in the process of refining the nuts and bolts aspects of the

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<sup>7</sup> Patten, Gerald, "Cultural Landscapes: The Intent and the Tenor of the Times," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 3.

<sup>8</sup> Charles A. Birnbaum, "Making Educated Decisions on the Treatment of Historic Landscapes," *APT Bulletin* 24, no. 3-4 (1992): 43.

<sup>9</sup> This issue is *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991).

<sup>10</sup> Constance Webster, "Cultural Landscapes: The French Influence in New Jersey," *Landscape Journal* 5, no. 2 (1986): 114.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Clous, "Historic Residential Landscapes in Georgia: The Georgia Living Places Project," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 4.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Barthold, "Documenting Historic Parks in the Nation's Capital," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 7.





inventory process. They are currently testing a comprehensive inventory card which allows the historic documentation and field survey data on the park system's cultural resources to be collected and arranged in an accessible format.<sup>13</sup> Finally, some landscape preservation advocates have very specialized inventory needs. Such was the case with the Puslinch Roadside Heritage Society (Ontario, Canada) whose members fought for the preservation of the historic roadside trees which endowed the community with a distinct character. Once the nineteenth century "cathedral trees" are documented, the group plans to lobby for policy changes that will protect the trees from future destruction.<sup>14</sup>

The creation of inventories and compilation of relevant landscape documentation is usually only one step in a larger preservation process. For the National Park Service, the inventory stage lays the foundation for the final goal of developing a landscape component for a site's General Management Plan (GMP).<sup>15</sup> The process is completed when the appropriate "treatment selection" is chosen. The treatments described in the Secretary of the Interior's standards parallel those in the guidelines for rehabilitating historic buildings and include: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> Treatment selections will vary depending on the findings uncovered in previous stages of site analysis. The extent of existing documentation, integrity of the landscape, level of significance, and intended use of the site are all factors that influence this decision.<sup>17</sup>

Preservation would be appropriate for sites like San Francisco's Presidio, a military base that upon closing in 1995 will become a part of the Golden Gate Recreational Area. Its historic features are still intact, the resources are best used to describe a span of time rather than one specific period, and extensive alterations to the

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Pollock-Ellwand, "Heritage Advocacy in the Cultural Landscape," *APT Bulletin* 24, no. 3-4 (1992): 74.

<sup>15</sup> Carey Feierabend, "The Presidio of San Francisco's Cultural Landscape," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 12.

<sup>16</sup> Birnbaum, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



site are not anticipated.<sup>18</sup> Rehabilitation would suit sites like the rural landscapes located within the Cuyahoga National Recreation Area in Ohio where again, the interpretation is not tied to a specific period in time, and changes in the site which complement its existing character (in this case reintroducing fallow land into active cultivation) are anticipated.<sup>19</sup> Complete restorations are more appropriate for contained, designed landscapes in which the period of significance is obvious, substantial documentation exists, and the scope of work is limited. Dumbarton Oaks Park in Washington, DC, a landscape designed by Beatrix Farrand, falls into this category. The park lies outside the present boundaries of the Georgetown estate and has experienced serious neglect over the course of several decades. Local volunteer groups are working to conduct a thorough clean-up of the environs, reclaim surviving design elements within the park, and recreate its former pastoral beauty.<sup>20</sup> The final treatment, recreation, is used only on a limited scale. It can be adopted when the reinstallation of select elements to a larger landscape is desired, or when the construction of a facsimile landscape is needed to interpret a significant site that has not survived.

At the present time, the National Park Service's approach is focused on managing the landscapes in their charge. They are treatment oriented, and each treatment involves intervention, though to admittedly varying degrees. A management plan is used to analyze and order elements of a cultural landscape and integrate them into a broad interpretive context. Generally, the cultural landscapes currently being interpreted by the National Park Service have a limited scope, and as a consequence, their interpretative programs are able to be more subtle and focus on details that might otherwise be overlooked. This approach can succeed in areas where an intact cultural landscape is owned and managed by one entity (either governmental or private).

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<sup>18</sup> Fejerabend, 12.

<sup>19</sup> David T. Humphrey, "The Evolving Landscape at Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 18.

<sup>20</sup> Adrian Higgins, "Dumbarton Oaks," *The Washington Post*, 16 September 1993, Home sec. , p. T12, Thursday, final edition, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.



### Heritage Parks and Regional Interpretation

Heritage areas represent another form of management which is currently being applied to historic landscapes. As of December 1994, there were five national Heritage Areas that had been designated by Congress: the Blackstone River Valley in Rhode Island, the Illinois and Michigan Canal in Illinois, the Delaware and Lehigh Canal in eastern Pennsylvania, America's Industrial Heritage Project in southwestern Pennsylvania, and the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley in Connecticut.<sup>21</sup> There are many more heritage areas awaiting congressional acknowledgment, and according to Shelley Mastran, director of the National Coalition for Heritage areas, "Scores of places in nearly every state have acquired or are seeking a degree of official or unofficial classification as heritage sites."<sup>22</sup> Pennsylvania has become a leader in the development of heritage areas at the state level. There are currently five existing State Heritage Parks and four more in at various stages of planning.<sup>23</sup> The established parks are: Oil Region Heritage Park, National Road Heritage Park Corridor, Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park, Lackawanna Heritage Valley, and the Delaware and Lehigh Heritage Valley. Those in the planning stages are: Steel Industry Heritage Park, Lincoln Highway Heritage Park Corridor, Endless Mountains Heritage Park, and the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor, which is of primary importance to this thesis.

Steve Packard, a field representative for the Nature Conservancy who is involved with the Illinois and Michigan Canal Corridor, believes that heritage areas provide a common vision for a region and are a valuable planning tool that both government agencies and private citizens can use.<sup>24</sup> These areas are composed of a network of resources that are linked by a policy-based agreement. In a designated heritage area,

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<sup>21</sup> James Andrews, "New Preservation Approach Aims to Save Cultural Landscape," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 December 1994, available of Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "New State Heritage Parks Named; Grants Announced - \$2 Million Awarded to SHPs," *News from the Allegheny Ridge* 1, no. 4 (July 1994), 1.

<sup>24</sup> David Fogarty, "Jewels of the Rust Belt," *Sierra* 70 (September / October 1985): 39.



cultural resources are privately owned and are managed independently, but an overall development goal for the heritage area is devised for participating sites: "In contrast to national or state parks, heritage areas - where most property remains in private hands - are an approach to resource conservation and management that emphasizes partnerships among all levels of government, environmentalists, business people, and citizen groups."<sup>25</sup>

This concept supports efforts to conserve natural and cultural resources in the landscape without forcing the government into the unenviable position of becoming a permanent landlord. Elizabeth Watson, chair of the National Coalition of Heritage Areas concurs, "Americans need more places to go to experience their heritage. We need to build partnerships to preserve the American landscape, not just lock land up in national parks."<sup>26</sup> Efforts among sites are coordinated to achieve the common goal of economic development and heritage promotion while, at the same time, working to preserve the natural and cultural resources in the landscape for the future. Program's like the National Trust's Main Street initiative have already helped guide towns in the Illinois and Michigan Canal Corridor towards responsible development of their existing resources.<sup>27</sup>

For better or worse, this integrated planning approach requires numerous layers of administration at the federal, state and local levels, because funding for different aspects of the project are tied to a variety of governmental and private incentive programs. Unlike the management structure of the National Park Service, no one organization has total authority. It is management by consensus, which takes time and patience.

Interpretation in heritage areas draws on a wide array of resources. The scope is regional rather than local, and the resources tend to be dispersed rather than concentrated. The Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor will pass through five counties and encompass

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<sup>25</sup> Andrews.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Peter H. Brink, "Livable Communities and Historic Transportation Corridors," *CRM Bulletin* 16, no. 11 (1993): 52.





dozens of sites. This corresponds with the vast format espoused by other established corridors like the Illinois and Michigan Canal Corridor which includes: 18 Chicago neighborhoods, 43 towns, broad expanses of the Des Plaines and Illinois river valleys, and 37 nature areas with wetlands and prairies.<sup>28</sup> The Blackstone River Corridor is 46 miles long and contains 40 cities and large tracts of farmland and forest.<sup>29</sup> Los Caminos Del Rio is another heritage project currently underway that has an even more ambitious goal - to link sites on both the Mexican and American sides of the Rio Grande river along a 200 mile stretch from Laredo to Brownsville on the Gulf of Mexico. Over 230 interpretive sites within this corridor have been identified thus far.<sup>30</sup> Interpretation of the cultural landscape is achieved through the promotion of accessible, tourist-compatible resources, rather than on the more subtle details that might merit explication in a smaller, more intimate setting. The focus is not on the complexities of any one individual site, but on the connections between separate sites within a proscribed region that endow that area with a distinct elemental character.

Heritage areas are unlike traditional historical parks, and the concept's supporters see them as a complement to the large national parks in western half of the country, since the creation of that type of park on large tracts of open ground has been impossible on the densely populated east coast. In congressional testimony on the Blackstone Heritage Corridor, Louise Redding, chair of its commission, stated:

For those of us who represent states east of the Mississippi and who are concerned with the aesthetic value of the landscapes of our states, this project is particularly exciting. Unlike western states where large tracts of land are protected by the National Park Service, most eastern states simply do not have open expanses of land available to develop as national parks in the traditional sense.... Just as the great national parks of the west

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<sup>28</sup> Fogarty, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Andrews.

<sup>30</sup> Gerald Moorhead, "Return to Roots Spurs Inner City and Border Preservation," *Architectural Record* (October 1991): 29. An informative publication which discusses this corridor in more detail is: Mario Sanchez, ed. *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture, and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor* (Austin, TX: Los Caminos Del Rio Heritage Project and the Texas Historic Commission, 1991).



symbolize the expansiveness and independence that is part of our history, the Blackstone River Corridor captures another aspect of our collective heritage -- a heritage that is rooted in the communities and industries of the east coast and which helped define the nineteenth century American experience.<sup>31</sup>

These areas have become a park alternative. The emphasis is placed on historical interpretation and focuses on social context as opposed to the great-man / great-event scenario. Recreational activity within the area, while important, is a secondary goal.

Heritage parks are not physically unified in a readily perceptible sense. There are no explicit boundaries which define the landscape or focus a visitor's perception of it, though they often follow an existing path of historic significance like a river, canal system, or railway. A system of consistent signage within a heritage area usually provides one source of structure, and orientation information is generally offered at gateway points along major transportation routes. The action of getting into one's car and moving from one site to the next can break up the continuity of the landscape interpretation, since the intermediate areas between sites lack historic context and are under no managerial control. However, this characteristic can be seen as a positive element, since passage to and from sites will take a visitor through vital, living communities - not those enclaves inhabited by mannequins which often populate park service installations. People can see historic evolution and the passage of time in a given region. This concept may be more complex than a period-specific interpretive program in museum-context, but the opportunity to see and understand the underlying forces working on an historic landscape rewards the extra effort. Each group of people that encounters a heritage area will have a distinct experience, since there is no one "right" way to tour this type of open-ended park. Visitors choose from a large selection of sites and tailor their own interpretive program.

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<sup>31</sup> Senate Energy Committee, Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks, *Testimony of Senator John Kerry on the Creation of the New Bedford Whaling Museum and the Extension of the Boundaries of the Blackstone River Corridor*, 2 August 1994, Federal Document Clearing House, Inc. - Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.



The management programs offered by the National Park Service, and the development programs espoused by proponents of heritage areas illustrate two different styles of interpreting our national landscape. Each is suited to a particular situation. The National Park Service's approach works best when the site to be interpreted is relatively small and owned by one organization. Heritage areas work better if the scope is regional, and resources are spread among various sites that are run independently. Though both approaches depend on the creation of an accurate inventory and a foundation of historic research, the first approach tends towards controlling the landscape and bringing it in line with a preconceived interpretation, while the latter approach is to present a variety of sites and leave that interpretation open-ended.

The entire field of cultural landscape interpretation is still in its infancy, and I believe that preservation-minded individuals should continue to seek other alternative approaches for landscape interpretation. Linking interpretation of cultural landscapes to rail trails would serve to unite different aspects of the two previously mentioned choices. A trail's linear nature, its confined space, and the fact that the rights of ways are controlled by the local government, gives the trail experience a certain amount of definition. These qualities present a scenario that is similar to the National Park Service's version of interpretation. However, the land to either side of the trail is under private ownership, and continues to be an active, changing, dynamic landscape. This situation is similar to that of a heritage area. By combining these two approaches, rail trails can move beyond their simple roles as recreational sites, and develop more complexity by offering an interpretation of lands flanking the public corridor. These trails are tools which allow local communities to take part in telling their own history.

#### Background on Trail Initiatives

The concept of developing trails that can provide people with access to natural and historic resources is well-established. The National Trail Systems Act has been in



place for over two decades.<sup>32</sup> This act provided a government sanctioned framework for the creation of a nation-wide system of long-distance trails. Perhaps the best known examples are the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail that traverse the width of the country in its easternmost and westernmost sections. There are, however, numerous other trails that have attained status as National Historic Trails or are awaiting that determination. In order to merit such a distinction and the financial backing that accompanies it, a route must meet the following three criteria:

A) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use.

B) It must be of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American history, such as trade and commerce, exploration, migration and settlement, or military campaigns.

C) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.<sup>33</sup>

Studies which precede these applications also include an analysis of a trail's financial feasibility, the burdens of maintenance, the potential audience, and the historic resources along the route. Of the thirty-six trails currently under consideration, the vast majority are several hundred miles in length, and many, like the Continental Divide Trail and the North Country Trails, cross thousands of miles of terrain. They are located in every region of the country and are endowed with a varied spectrum of associations: the Bartram Trail in the southeast, the Pony Express Trail from Missouri to California, the Alaskan Gold Rush Trail, and the Ala Kahakai Trail in Hawaii.<sup>34</sup>

As is mentioned in criteria "C", one of the main functions of the trail system is to serve as a recreational resource for the residents of the communities through which they pass, as well as for those hardy souls who take on the challenge of recreating an historic

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<sup>32</sup> Cheri Rai Wolpert, "Do Tread on Me; National Hiking Trails," *Women's Sports and Fitness* 11, no. 6 (July 1989): 36, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>33</sup> National Trails System Act, *United States Code Service*, title 60 - Conservation, chapter 27 - National Trails System, 16 USCS @1244 (1994), available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>34</sup> National Trails System Act, *United States Code Service*, title 60 - Conservation, chapter 27 - National Trails System, 16 USCS @1244 (1994), available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.





passage. These national trails are major arteries in the overall plan to develop a network of non-motorized transportation routes in this country. The creation of this network has garnered support in all sectors of government. Not surprisingly, policies of the Department of the Interior support the creation of "recreation and historic trails on lands owned or administered by States... or in or nearby urban areas" and encourage consideration of historic trails in statewide comprehensive historic preservation plans.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that the same attitude is seen in the policies of the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and Transportation, all of which are vested with the responsibility of encouraging the development of these trails within their sphere of influence.<sup>36</sup>

As a consequence, numerous trail-related programs have developed to fulfill this goal of having "a new system of park lands, a vast network of linear open spaces reaching all across the country --a system called greenways."<sup>37</sup> Studies have been made for more national trails like the American Discovery Trail, which if created, would become the most massive of all trails at 5,500 miles.<sup>38</sup> There are also planned regional projects like the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail which could some day encompass a network of trails connecting the Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River Valley.<sup>39</sup> It is a slightly smaller project, but it does have a regional scope. The Hudson River Valley Greenway is smaller still, but remains a daunting undertaking. When complete, it will connect cities and towns in ten New York counties along a 130 mile stretch of the river, by linking existing parks, trails, publicly held property, and abandoned railroad rights of way.<sup>40</sup>

### Rails to Trails Programs

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<sup>35</sup> National Trails System Act, *United States Code Service*, title 60 - Conservation, chapter 27 - National Trails System, 16 USCS @1247 (1994), available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> National Trail Systems Act Amendments, *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 2d sess., vol. 134, no. 129, 134 Cong Rec S 12853, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>38</sup> American Discovery Trail, *Congressional Record*, 102nd Cong., 2d sess., vol. 138, no. 144, 134 Cong Rec S 17863, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Lea, "Potomac Heritage," *Wilderness* 51 (summer 1988): 28.

<sup>40</sup> David Sampson, "Hudson River Valley Greenway," *CRM Bulletin* 16, no. 11 (1993), 45.



In spite of reams of paperwork, statutes, and regulations which can be created in support of a concept, all of the best intentions in government lie impotent if there is no one to act upon them and turn those plans into action. May Theilgaard Watts was one of those key people, she was a woman of action. In 1963 Watts, a naturalist at the Morton Arboretum, seized on what she saw as an invaluable community opportunity, the chance to turn an abandoned railroad line into a walking path through the western suburbs of Chicago. In her letter to the *Chicago Tribune*, she discussed how the path would provide people with access to a significant landscape:

We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet....We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one.<sup>41</sup>

Look ahead some years into the future. Imagine yourself going for a walk on an autumn day. The path lies ahead, curving around a hawthorn tree, then proceeding under the shade of a forest of sugar maple trees, dipping into a hollow of ferns, then skirting a thicket of wild plum, to straighten out for a long stretch of prairie, tall grass prairie with big blue stem, and blazing star, and silphium and goldenrod.<sup>42</sup>

For May Theilgaard Watts, the plantscapes of that trail offered a major contribution to the quality of life in and around Chicago. A trail would enable people to reach out and experience the landscape on foot and reconnect with its vital character. In addition, abandoned railroad rights of way are particularly suited to reuse as recreational trails, because they are level, the grade is not steep, there are generally only a limited number of highway crossings, and they pass through many scenic areas that would otherwise be inaccessible to the general public.<sup>43</sup> After many years of lobbying and many more of public relations work, local volunteers realized the goal of creating a permanent trail. The Illinois Prairie Path became one of the first rail trail conversion projects in the country.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 2d sess., 1988, vol. 134, no. 108, 134 Cong Rec E 2481, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>42</sup> Stevenson Swanson, "Rail to Trail Movement Grows," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 October 1987, sec. News, p. 3-C, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>43</sup> National Trail Systems Improvement Act of 198, *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 2d sess., vol. 134, no. 50, 134 Cong Rec H 1665, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



Supporters had to overcome strong opposition on the part of adjoining property owners, who either wanted to claim the right of way as their own property or feared potential trespassers, but the trail advocacy group persevered and finally succeeded. A property's proximity to the path is now recognized as a major selling point in real estate advertising for that community.<sup>45</sup>

The creation of the fifty-five mile long Illinois Prairie Path differs from the development of the enormous system of national trails mentioned earlier in this section. It was a locally initiated venture of a limited scope, a mere capillary in the greater arterial system of non-motorized transportation corridors. The resources, both natural and cultural, accessed by the route were of merit in discussing the history of that community, but did not have the sweeping thematic context of the much larger national trails. It is the interpretive potential of these smaller trails that is of interest to this study.

Rail trail conversions are becoming increasingly popular with planning departments who are constrained to meet the demand for increased recreation and open space without the benefit of an adequate budget for property acquisitions. Presently, money slated for acquisition of open space is often utilized for the purchase of land for trails, since a trail project can accomplish both goals.<sup>46</sup> In some instances, rail trails are funded in part by the sale of utility easements which run under the right of way. Such deals are a boon to utilities like U.S. Sprint and AT&T. These two companies have run fiber optics cables under the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle and the Washington and Old Dominion Trail in Washington, DC - both densely populated areas where access to a lengthy strip of land held by one owner is an extremely rare commodity.<sup>47</sup> By running their cables under rail trail rights of way, these companies did not have to negotiate with perhaps hundreds of individual property owners as would generally be the case.

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<sup>45</sup> Illinois Prairie Path, Congressional *Record*, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., 1988, vol. 134, no. 108, 134 Cong Rec E 2481, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>46</sup> Jackie Powder, "Park Linking East and West Mount Airy Set to Get \$40,000 from Maryland," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 September 1994, Local News sec., p. 3B, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>47</sup> Pena, Nelson, "On Track," *Bicycling* 32 (July 1991), 94-5.



Rail trails can also offer a great deal of public recreation access on a limited amount of land. According to Philip Crist, a community affairs coordinator for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, it takes only 200 acres of right of way to create a trail that is 20 miles long and offers availability to a broad section of any given community.<sup>48</sup> Last year there were over 7,000 miles of rail trails in the country, and over 600 of those were in Pennsylvania.<sup>49</sup> Rail trails are currently attracting an enormous number of users, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy boasts over 72,000 members.<sup>50</sup> Existing trails were used 75 million times in 1992 and 85 million times in 1993.<sup>51</sup> This success is primarily due to the intervention of two parties, the Federal Government and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

In 1988, legislation was established which revoked a governmental policy established in 1922 of giving federally-granted rights of way to adjacent property owners upon the abandonment of a railroad line.<sup>52</sup> The National Trail System Improvement Act streamlined the process known as railbanking, a process that is critical to the development of rail trails. Railbanking enables railroad rights-of-way remain intact for possible future use, but frees them for use as recreational paths until such a time as they are needed.<sup>53</sup> Prior to this legislation, development of rail trails could be accomplished, but community groups were forced to run a gauntlet of legal snarls over complex property transfers before they could obtain the legal right to preserve the paths for recreational purposes. The National Trail Systems Improvements Act states that:

Abandoned rights of way are to be retained by the federal government. If they are located within the boundaries of a national forest or conservation area, they are to be incorporated into that forest or area, and those adjacent to public lands are to be managed in accordance with the federal policy

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<sup>48</sup> "Rail Trails Can Take You Far," *Rocky Mountain News*, 10 September 1994, Local sec., p. 38A, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>49</sup> Tom Sexton, Julie Larison, and Bill Metzger, *Pennsylvania's Rail Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1995), 24.

<sup>50</sup> Informational Pamphlet, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Washington, DC, 1995.

<sup>51</sup> Sexton, 60, and Karen-Lee Ryan and Julie Winterich, eds. *Secrets of Successful Rail Trails: An Acquisition and Organizing Manual for Converting Rails into Trails* (Washington, DC: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1993), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Patricia Byrnes, "Trailroads," *Wilderness* 51 (summer 1988): 21.

<sup>53</sup> Pena, 93.





and management act.... The measure calls for other retained abandoned rights of way - those not located within or adjacent to federal lands - to be managed by the Interior Department and used for recreational trails or other public recreation purposes.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, the Department of the Interior is permitted to sell land that is deemed inappropriate for trail development and use the proceeds towards the creation of trails in other areas.<sup>55</sup> The constitutionality of this procedure was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990, and thousands of miles of abandoned corridors have been railbanked in the past four years.<sup>56</sup> Opportunities for railbanking appear to be practically limitless at present. Over 150,000 miles of tracks have been abandoned since the 1920's at an annual rate of about three to four thousand miles a year.<sup>57</sup> That figure represents three times the amount of existing interstate highway in this country (50,000 miles)!<sup>58</sup>

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy was founded in 1985 and has since become a major player in this movement. Their mission is as follows:

Our mission is to develop a nationwide network of interconnected trails for recreation, transportation, and open space conservation, using rail-trails as the backbone. This system will connect people with disabilities, equestrians, runners, skiers, hikers, and others to enjoy the beauty of the American landscape.<sup>59</sup>

It is an organization composed of individuals who support alternative forms of transportation and believe that a national trail system would complement the interstate highway system and serve those who choose to travel by non-motorized means.<sup>60</sup>

Currently, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is focusing their efforts on lobbying and advocating for rail trails. The organization has established a support network offering

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<sup>54</sup> National Trail Systems Improvements Act, *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 2d sess., 1988, vol. 134, no. 50, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>55</sup> National Trail Systems Improvements Act of 1987, *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., 1987, vol. 133, no. 95, 133 Cong Rec E 2360, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>56</sup> Pat Forgey, "Astoria May Turn Loss To Opportunity," *The Oregonian*, 19 October 1994, sec. B, p. 7, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>57</sup> David Burwell, Informational letter on the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 10 February 1995.

<sup>58</sup> Sexton, 78.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan, ix.

<sup>60</sup> Sexton, 1.



technical assistance to communities planning rail trail projects. It has also published a selection of materials which discuss various aspects of the process from organizing community support, to filing the appropriate documents, and even offers design guidelines for trails. These are important services, because even with the National Trails System Improvements Act, procedural requirements remain confusing. One of the main reasons for the creation of this organization was the fact that "the rail abandonment process is complex, with many pitfalls, short deadlines, and limited opportunities for citizens, trail groups, and agencies to get involved. Many corridors are lost before the public even knows of their availability."<sup>61</sup>

In order to combat the latter problem, the Conservancy keeps track of proposed abandonments nationwide and notifies local governments and trail advocates, so that immediate action to obtain the land may be taken. They do not advocate the abandonment of existing rail lines, acknowledging their historic importance and utility, but when railroad lines are abandoned, the Conservancy espouses preserving them for future use and recreational enjoyment.<sup>62</sup> The Conservancy is also involved with public education and promoting the use of the trails, and they have created several guidebooks which describe state and national trail systems.

The landscapes through which rail trails pass are extremely diverse. The Burke-Gilman and the Washington and Old Dominion trails, which are located within the metropolitan regions of Seattle and Washington, DC are heavily used by commuters and local residents. Their character is primarily urban, punctuated by a few pockets of natural scenery. Others, like the Caprock Canyons Trailway in Texas, are farther removed from the daily grind. This trail is part of a state park, and the surroundings are extremely rugged. There, the scenery is dominated by mesquite, cacti, and mule deer, and the closest town is Quitaque, population 500.<sup>63</sup> People move along recreational trails in a

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<sup>61</sup> Informational Pamphlet, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Washington, DC, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Ryan, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Rada, Joe, "Rail Trails: After the Trains Are Gone," *Southern Living* 20 (May 1994): 18.



variety of ways. The Caprock trail is frequented by equestrians, and in Wisconsin and Minnesota many of the trails are authorized for seasonal use by cross country skiers and snowmobilers. Roller-blades, bikes, and walkers dominate most neighborhood trails which have quickly become popular destinations for family outings.

In some cases, the introduction of trails has had limited impact on the surrounding landscape. The creation of recreational paths was merely renewing an already existing landscape feature with little appreciable consequence. However, in other instances, primarily in urban areas like the Pinellas Trail in Florida, the introduction of trails has transformed areas that had previously been considered "shabby, neglected, industrial troughs" into productive, accessible landscapes. In these cases not only has the transportation path been renewed, but the entire surrounding landscape as well.<sup>64</sup>

Rail trails have become a notable component in the development of heritage tourism in Pennsylvania. They are seen as a vehicle for economic development and as a means of addressing local recreation needs. Great support has been offered by local trail groups, and funding from diverse sources including ISTEA grants, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission (SPHPC), local membership drives, and donations from private individuals have enabled the creation of several hundred miles of trails.<sup>65</sup> The state currently has sixty rail-trails, most of which are concentrated in the southern and western portions of the state.

A section of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission is devoted to trails. This plan states that trails are to be developed as "tangible links to the nearby historic and cultural resources."<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note, that in addition to connecting regional visitors with

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *A View of the Past: A Vision for the Future 1993 Annual Report* (Holidaysburg, PA: Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission, 1993), 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Comprehensive Management Plan for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission*, United States Department of the Interior, December 1992, p. 44.



area resources, the planning agency believes that "the trails will serve as historic attractions in themselves."<sup>67</sup> However, there is no further specification of how the trails will be developed as historic attractions or what type of interpretation might be involved, if any. I believe that while trails are often determined to be important components of heritage area development, the commissions involved generally overlook a trail's interpretive potential for discussing the vernacular landscape through which it passes. Creating a context for the major cultural attractions in an area, by opening up a dialogue about the surrounding landscape that is visible from the trails would create a far richer and more integrated experience for the visitor.

In order to obtain a true sense of a region's character, it is important to look at living landscapes, in addition to managed historic sites. Some trails hold little evidence of the past, while others have rich artifactual resources. Trails in areas that do not possess notable historic resources could be devoted to other specialized uses like a neighborhood cardiac fitness trail, as in the case with a trail in the suburbs of Pittsburgh.<sup>68</sup> However, preservationists should capitalize on those trails located within the bounds of heritage areas, like the potential Pickering Valley Trail. These trails could be developed in such a way as to complement existing historic sites by filling in the intermediary gaps that create that highly sought after "sense of place."

#### Current State of U.S. Trail Interpretation

For years, interpretation along recreational trails was generally linked to environmental issues - the nature trail concept. My research indicates that few trails feature information related to history or aspects of the cultural landscape. Even heritage corridors interpret specific sites and towns by introducing general historic background information, however, they do not always take the next step of linking that information to surviving physical evidence remaining in the landscape. People should know that many

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Beth Trapani, "Rails-to-Trails May Lead to a Boon." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 9 October 1994. Metro sec., p. W2, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.





historic artifacts have survived to the present, but they need assistance to discover those specific clues in the landscape. Unfortunately, the grand scope of most heritage corridors makes that degree of specificity and detail prohibitive. That type of interpretation would be appropriate for a much smaller, local trail. The Pickering Valley Corridor Recreation Trail which I propose, could serve as a prototype for a new community-based approach to the interpretation of the vernacular landscape. Such an approach would cultivate a local audience, those who have a voice in determining long-range planning policies relating to the preservation of cultural resources and open space.

If the field of preservation is to succeed in the long run, its advocates must cultivate an educated constituency. According to Robert Melnick, who has worked with the National Parks Service towards developing a methodology for landscape preservation, a nationwide inventory of historic landscape resources is underway, but "...important landscapes are being lost and degraded daily, because the survey process is painstakingly slow. What is needed is broader public-sector support and continued volunteer initiatives."<sup>69</sup> In the end, people must *want* to save aspects of their community for future generations, and they must have access to historical information in order to make discerning choices about what to save:

We protect what we understand and value....The goal of interpretation is to create or enhance sensitivity, awareness, understanding, appreciation, and commitment. Indifference is most dangerous. An indifferent person either assigns no value or devalues the thing for which they have no feeling. It is, therefore, far easier to damage or destroy it since it apparently has no relevance to their life.<sup>70</sup>

The vast network of rail trails across the country offers a user-friendly medium through which interpretive information could effectively be disseminated to combat the problem of indifference.

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Z. Melnick, "Toward a Preservation Ethic," *Landscape Architecture* 77, no.4 (1987): 136.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Risk, "Interpretation - A Road to Creative Enlightenment," *CRM Bulletin* 16, no. 11 (1993): 47.



A similar approach to interpreting vernacular landscapes took hold in England over fifteen years ago. "Town Trails" began popping up in cities across the country. The literature on them offers the following description: "Both urban trails and walks may be regarded as planned and self-guided routes through urban areas which may be walked by anybody who is interested, and which are indicated by markers in the townscape or more commonly by published brochures."<sup>71</sup> British planners saw it as an urban counterpart to the rural interpretive techniques of nature trails and field study centers. Most of the several hundred town trails were developed by local communities, many times in conjunction with children and teachers at nearby schools. The guides identify various aspects of the surrounding townscape within the context of a specified theme like: an industrial trail, an Edwardian housing trail, a tree trail, and a riverside trail.<sup>72</sup> While many of the trails are used by school groups, evidence has shown that they have an even wider audience. In fact, several planning authorities have already seen these trails as an integral preliminary step towards encouraging public participation in the local planning process.<sup>73</sup> Town trail signs and guides give people the information they need to establish stronger ties to the communities where they live. In Goodey's opinion, "Trails are an interpretive tool appropriate to our times," and I wholeheartedly concur.<sup>74</sup>

It appears that the union of local trails and interpretation has not yet taken hold in the United States. In order to determine the degree to which historic interpretation is incorporated into recreational trails, I contacted managers of ten rail trails and reviewed a selection of informational brochures.<sup>75</sup> My findings were as follows: one trail had signs

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<sup>71</sup> Brian Goodey, "Towards a New Perception of the Environment: Using the Town Trail," chapter 22 in *The Conservation of European Cities*, ed. Donald Appleyard (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979), 285. This chapter provides valuable information on the specifics of developing a local interpretive trail. It discusses points to consider in developing and evaluating trails and the nature of trail content, as well as providing a number of case studies for existing British Town Trails.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-93.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>75</sup> The surveys were conducted by telephone, and the trails included are as follows: Elroy-Sparta Trail, WI; Glacial Drumlin State Park Trail, WI; Sugar River Rail Trail, WI; Burke-Gilman Trail, WA; Cape Cod Rail Trail, MA; Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park Trail, PA; Washington and Old



## TOWER U

A single railroad track serviced both the west and east bound trains in this area. Sidetracks were built to remedy this problem so train traffic could keep moving. Trains coming from Norwalk pulled onto a sidetrack located here to allow a west bound train to proceed. After the train passed, the sidetracked trains would continue eastward.

Early steam engines required a supply of water at all times. This stopping point, called "Tower U", had a water tower. Engines were able to replenish their water supply here. Water towers were also placed in other locations along the trail line.

A telephone operator was stationed here and a warehouse was built to store potatoes before shipping. With the modernization of engines and communications, "Tower U" soon disappeared with only a sidetrack remaining.

FS-11

## TUNNEL #3

After three years of digging and chiseling, Tunnel #3 was completed in 1873. With the completion of the three tunnels, railroad traffic was able to travel from Southern Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Northern Iowa to Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago.

This tunnel is 3,810 feet long. Because of its great length, excavation was done from each end and two shafts were dug from above. These shafts were later closed up with bricks inside the tunnel. One shaft remains open above. All work was done with handtools, horses, and oxen.

Notice the water dripping in the tunnel. Underground, or in this case, overhead springs were a common problem for railroad builders.

ES-22

## THE FLUME

Heavy rainfalls caused serious erosion problems in this deep valley leading to the tunnel entrance.

To solve this problem, the railroad crews built this massive stone water diversion ditch. Now the water is contained as it flows to the watershed lake and on to Morris Creek near Norwalk. This ditch begins at the top of the tunnel and stretches down the valley for approximately one-quarter of a mile. The flume still serves as an important soil and water conservation device today.

## RAILROAD TRESSLES

The long, narrow ridge you are standing on is one of several railroad tressles built over 100 years ago.

In order to maintain a 3% grade leading to the tunnels, tressles were built of rock, soil, and cinders. Notice the black cinders around you. These are the byproducts of the coal burning train engines. Without these tressles, the deep narrow valleys would have been impassable for the trains.

Water flowing down the valley runs through stone archways at the tressle base.

ES-24

## WHISTLE POST

When the engineer saw this post, he sounded the train whistle. The whistle post was designed as a safety measure when nearing crossroads. People driving their horse and buggy or automobile would then know that the train was approaching and would yield the right-of-way. Several whistle posts such as this one have been reconstructed along the trail.

ES-10

## BRAKEMEN'S WARNING POLE

The early trains using this track were stopped by a manual braking system. The braking system was a hand crank located on the top and ends of each railroad car. A brakeman was required to stand on top of the rail cars to operate the hand crank.

The heavy wires hanging from this pole were just long enough to touch the top of the cars. As the train passed under the pole, the wires made contact with the brakeman, warning him to climb down before entering the tunnel.

Another name for this warning device is the "Hobo Pole." Homeless men often tried to hitch a free ride on top of the train.

This is the only brakemen's warning pole left on the trail. During the railroad days, there was one located at each end of the three tunnels.

ES-8

Fig. 23

Text panels from signs along the Elroy-Sparta Trail in Wisconsin.

These blocks of text successfully interpret surviving physical evidence in an historic landscape. Provided by Jim Morehead, Trail Manager, Elroy-Sparta Trail, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.



discussing historic landscape features in some depth. Five trails had a combination of pamphlets and signs that provided limited interpretation of natural features and wildlife with an occasional historic reference, and four trails lacked any form of interpretation.

Three of the ten trails were located in Wisconsin, a state that took a pro-active approach towards developing rail trails several decades ago. Their trail programs are managed through the state park system and are well-established. Not surprisingly, they also have the most fully developed approach to interpretive programming. The Elroy-Sparta Trail, one of the country's earliest rail trails, worked with the local historical society to develop signage and a guidebook for the route. The signs point out both natural and man-made features along the trail and incorporate period photographs. The guidebook is also keyed to specific areas of interest along the trail. The restored railroad depot serves as an office building for the trail staff, and other surviving structures have been adapted for use as rest stops.<sup>76</sup>

Facilities at Sugar River Trail, also part of the Wisconsin state system, are somewhat less developed. In our phone conversation, Steve Johnson, trail manager, told me that they had a guidebook keyed to posts along the trail with some historic information, but that it was under-utilized.<sup>77</sup> Glacial Drumlin State Park Trail has had even less success in establishing an interpretive program. There are a limited number of signs, which are preferred over guidebooks, and friends groups are trying to gain funding support to put more in place along the trail. They are in the process of conducting research on the area, but have had little assistance from local preservation groups or the local historical society in their requests for information.<sup>78</sup> A general brochure for the Wisconsin State Park System mentions nature hikes offering "scenic beauty" and "natural

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<sup>76</sup> Jim Morehead, Trail Manager Elroy-Sparta State Park Trail, telephone conversation with the author, 2 February 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Steve Johnson, Trail Manager Sugar River Trail, telephone conversation with the author, 2 February 1995.

<sup>78</sup> Dana White, Trail Manager Glacial Drumlin State Park, telephone conversation with the author, 2 February 1995.





## TOWNS ALONG THE WAY

### ● BEESDOP

(pop. 3310) The 22-entrance access point to the Sugar River Trail. Reaches out to public parks, a nearby swimming pool, golf course, canoeing and fishing. Historical Depot. Via south. There are additional marked bicycle trails on secondary roads. They include the "Hull" Way Tree. Legendary spot used by early day Indians to indicate they were halfway between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River. Covered bridge, food, lodging. Trailside restroom, water and parking at West End Avenue and Exchange Street.

### ● ALBERT

(pop. 1057) Situated in a valley, where the beauty of the Sugar River is unspoiled and where the peace of the countryside is enjoyed with urban pleasures. Three parks with all-estate tables, shelter, and playground facilities. Camping and nature trails covering 40 acres. Here the Lullie Sugar and the Sugar Rivers join, offering all water sports, fishing, water skiing, or canoeing, to Roberts Lane on the Wildlife Preserve. Much of the land is still virgin prairie untouched by the plow. Four churches with Sunday services. Yesterday Day Celebration on Memorial Day weekend. County Veterans Banquet Music Festival 3rd Sunday in July. Food, Trailside restroom, water, parking.

### ● MONMOUTH

(pop. 1042) Offers Lake Monmouth and picnic area with shelter, Swiss Terrace, and Townhall (cafeteria, dining and dancing, public swimming pool, tennis courts). Highlighting the summer is the annual Summerfest and chicken barbecue the 2nd weekend in July. Food, Trailside restroom, water, parking.

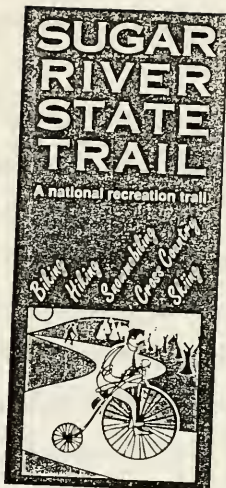
### ● NEW GLANS

(pop. 1763) Center of "America's Little Switzerland." Featuring St. Hubert's, Wilmuth Park, Elmer's Health Food, Walker's Swiss House at Museum, Chert of the London Flare, Museum's chess and party shops. Swiss music and dancing, old world gourmet dining. Edithen's Chert golf course. Royal Club, petting zoo shops, and houses, visited as Swiss architecture, public swimming pool, and lake. Wisconsin State Park (camping). This New Glans Woods State Park (camping), with there and other attractions, marks the northern access to the Sugar River Trail. Food, lodging.

Order the following items using MasterCard or Visa by calling 800-368-2343. Or, you can purchase them in person using cash or check at nearby New Glans Woods State Park.

Annual Park Sticker (resident)	\$15.00
Annual Park Sticker (non-resident)	24.00
Season Trail Card	10.00
Daily Trail Card	3.00
Traveller's Guide to Wisconsin State Park & Forests (with purchase of sticker)	7.00
150.00 = 15.00 (with book sticker)	9.40
Postage & Handling (for books only per book)	1.55
Wisconsin Natural Resources (by phone order)	6.97
Magazine for one year	3.15
Trails 53.00 = 13.00 (with purchase of sticker)	1.00
Postage and handling with MasterCard or Visa	

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 1001 W. Wisconsin Ave., P.O. Box 100, New Glans, WI 53070-0100



## TRAIL INFORMATION

The 39 kilometer Sugar River State Trail follows the abandoned Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul railroad bed in south central Wisconsin.

The trail is paved with limestone screenings, providing a hard, smooth surface for comfortable travel.

Tricite bridges have painted floors and safety railings. The trail offers level biking, hiking, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing over rolling hills, verdant meadows, and state wildlife refuges.

Extensive country bike trails crisscross the country road along marked routes.

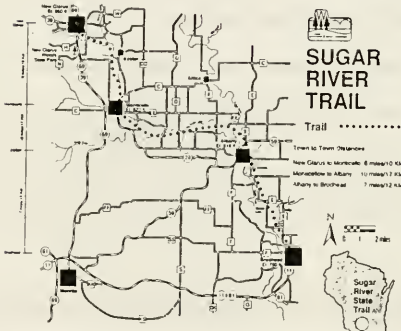
The Sugar River State Trail, developed and maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, is part of Wisconsin's 1st Age Trail, also a National Recreation Trail, and lies on the Wisconsin East-West Bike-By

## SAFETY MESSAGE

Bike trails are surfaced with fine lime stone or similar materials. They are not designed for high speed travel. They can become soft and wet, can erode quickly during heavy rains, and are subject to annual damage. Keep your bike under full control at all times. Keep at least two-hike lengths between riders and warn others when passing. Bike clothing (reflective for night riding) where, plain leg clips, and helmets are recommended.

## BIKE RENTAL

Single, five-speed and tandem bikes can be rented at the Sugar River Trail headquarters in the railroad depot (Railroad Street 1 and Fifth Avenue) in New Glans.



## DRIVER-ONLY SERVICE

Bring two sets of car keys (if possible) to New Glans Trail Headquarters. Ask for a driver to take you in YOUR vehicle to the trail village where you wish to begin your bike trip. Driver will return your vehicle where it will be waiting for you. Drivers can usually be had within an hour or less. Minimal fee.

For further information call or write Sugar River Trail, P.O. Box 781, New Glans, WI 53074 (Phone area 608/327-2343). Or visit Sugar River Trail Headquarters in the railroad depot, Railroad Street and Fifth Avenue, adjacent to Highway 69 in New Glans.

## OVERNIGHT PARKING

Overnight parking on trail parking lots at Albany, Brimley, Monmouth and New Glans by permit available at Trail Headquarters in New Glans. No camping allowed.

## TRAIL USER PERMIT

All Bikes, 16 year and older must purchase either a daily or a season trail user permit. Trail permits mailed free. Trailside bulletin boards.

Fig. 24

Map of the Sugar River State Trail in Wisconsin.

•Note the fact that the emphasis is on basic trail information. The descriptions of the towns along the route focus on amenities and events, and there is little mention of historic interest.

"Sugar River Trail," (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, March 1992, brochure / map).



phenomena," interpretive centers focusing on the natural history of the park, and self-guided nature trails, but offer no opportunities to explore other aspects of the historic landscape along the trail.<sup>79</sup>

The Washington and Old Dominion, the Burke-Gilman, and the Delaware and Raritan Canal Trails all incorporated a limited amount of interpretation into their trail experience, but it was primarily nature-related: birds, bats, etc. In one case the interpretive signage had even been funded and installed by the Sierra Club.<sup>80</sup> Managers of these trails were interested in establishing a more comprehensive program of interpretation for the landscape, but it was not a top priority since recreational use was the main attraction for the trail. The guides for these lower profile trails generally offer a one or two paragraph history of the railroad and a thumbnail sketch of some of the towns, but they provide no information on specific historic resources. Most of the information provided in the pamphlets is related to safety information, trail configuration, and the location of amenities like food and rest rooms.<sup>81</sup> Another specialized pamphlet would be needed to support a more comprehensive and detailed trail guide for these routes. The Washington and Old Dominion Trail does offer such a guide for a fee. It includes current photographs of sites and map of the trail with a half-dozen historical facts on the towns along the route.<sup>82</sup>

No interpretation of any kind has been considered for the Virginia Creeper, Struble, or Caprock Canyon Trails, however in the case of the latter, it only opened six months ago and efforts are still being expended on paving the parking lots and finishing the rest rooms. Perhaps once more trails become established, and the basic amenities are

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<sup>79</sup> "Interpretive Programs in Wisconsin State Parks and Forests" [n.d.] (Bureau of Parks and Recreation, Madison, WI, brochure).

<sup>80</sup> Kevin Bradford. Delaware and Raritan State Park, telephone conversation with the author, 2 February 1995.

<sup>81</sup> "Glacial Drumlin Trail" (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, March 1994, brochure / map). and "Sugar River Trail" (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, March 1992, brochure / map).

<sup>82</sup> "Trail Guide - Washington and Old Dominion Trail" (Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, spiral bound map and guide).







taken care of, interpretation will become a priority. The involvement of the preservation community could significantly advance this cause by promoting the interpretive potential of features along the trail and assisting with the necessary research needed to achieve an accurate interpretation.

### Who is the Audience for Trail Interpretation?

Trail users come from all types of backgrounds. They are commuters, mothers with strollers, veteran hikers, skaters, equestrians, skiers, snowmobilers, and cyclists.<sup>83</sup> There are also many walkers. With the rise in health-consciousness, walking has become one of America's favorite pastimes, but sidewalks are becoming rare, and the capacity of city parks has become over-extended.<sup>84</sup> Rail trails have begun to meet the needs of these individuals. Each group of trail users appreciates different aspects of the route, and they share an appreciation for an automobile-free zone in which they can participate in recreational activities and experience nature.

Some trails, especially those in rural areas, attract an out-of-town clientele who use the paths on weekends and holidays. This is the case with the Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail in Wisconsin, one of the first rail trail conversions. A survey of visitors conducted in 1988 revealed that nearly half the trail users came from out of state and traveled an average of 200+ miles to get to the site, and only half of the users had used the trail previously.<sup>85</sup> Other trails in urban areas like the Withlacoochee State Trail in Citrus County, Florida, have a user base that consists primarily of local residents who "find different parts of it to enjoy every day" and use it regularly for cycling and nature hikes.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Susan McGrath, "They've Been Walking on the Railroad," *National Wildlife* 26 (August / September 1988): 40.

<sup>84</sup> Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions - Mr. Metzenbaum, *Congressional Record*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 133, no. 123, 133 Cong Rec S 10691, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>85</sup> Tim Schwecke, et al., "A Look At Visitors on Wisconsin's Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail" (University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service, Madison, WI, 1988, photocopy), ii.

<sup>86</sup> Jorge Sanchez, "Withlacoochee Trail Mixes Fun and Exercise," *The Tampa Tribune*, 21 November 1994, Florida Edition, Citrus sec., p. 1, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.





The millions of rail trail users represent a vast potential audience who should have the opportunity to learn about the historic resources of their surroundings as well as the natural ones. A cultural landscape represents the interaction between man and his environment, and it is remiss to interpret only one half of this relationship. By uncovering aspects of local history existing within a landscape, preservationists could expose residents to valued aspects of their communities which have previously been taken for granted. Even if residents absorb only one bit of information each time they use the trail, the cumulative effect of regular visits could lead to a significant change in attitude about the importance of protecting certain resources. In cases where trails are used mainly by tourists, interpreting landscapes along the trail might endow visitors with basic skills of reading their surroundings which could later be applied to their own home landscapes.

Recreation and historic interpretation are not mutually exclusive activities, and educating the public about the world that surrounds them need not be confined to a museum or relegated to a polished historic site. This fact is recognized in the National Park Service's landscape analysis for the Presidio military base in San Francisco, which will soon be turned over for recreational use:

The analysis of the cultural landscape provides a holistic understanding of the interrelationships between the built and natural resources that affords many opportunities to the planning process. It can be an effective tool for integrating the past, present, and future, as well as for integrating cultural, natural, and recreational values in a win-win solution.<sup>87</sup>

Gradually, this attitude is filtering down to the local level as well, as shown by a recent promotional brochure for the York County Rail Trail which is under development and will connect York, PA with Freeland, MD. One of the membership incentives for supporting the trail is as follows, "By becoming a member of the York County Heritage Rail Trail, you will play a major role in *preserving our history*, as well as providing

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<sup>87</sup> Carey Feierabend, "The Presidio of San Francisco's Cultural Landscape," *CRM Bulletin* 14, no. 6 (1991): 14.



recreational, educational and economic benefits for generations to come."<sup>88</sup> This is the only instance I have seen in which promotional literature for a trail ranks the preservation of history above anticipated recreational use.

More typical is the attitude shown in the following description of the trail system in Pinellas, Florida: "The rails-to-trails movement addresses three important issues: the need to conserve open space, the increasing awareness for recreation, and the desire to preserve a piece of our history," however, "the first two are especially important in Pinellas County and elsewhere in Florida where places to play are becoming less available."<sup>89</sup> While I would not wish trail-side interpretation to overshadow a trail's recreational potential, it is important to remember that preservation, interpretation and recreation complement one another and, in partnership, can enhance a community's quality of life.

#### Trail Development and Related Preservation Projects

Funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) which was established by Congress in 1991 has been instrumental in combining historic preservation with recreational interests. One portion of this legislation provided for a disbursement of over \$30-billion which is being allocated to state and local governments over the course of six years and is being used to fund road construction.<sup>90</sup> Of that \$30-billion, ten percent of each state's allotment is devoted to transportation enhancements which are divided into ten categories including: landscaping, beautification projects, construction of facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians including rails-to-trails, acquisition

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<sup>88</sup> "York Heritage Rail Trail: Be A Part of York's Big Adventure" (York County Rail Trail Authority, York, PA, 1993, photocopied map and brochure).

<sup>89</sup> John Cutter, "Pinellas Trail: From Rails to Recreation," *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 August 1989. City Times sec., 1, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>90</sup> James Andrews, "Sprucing Up Highways Now Means More Than Tar: Trees and Trails, Too," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1 December 1994. U.S. National sec., p. 3, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.



of scenic easements and historic sites, rehabilitation of historic transportation buildings like depots, and other historic-preservation projects.<sup>91</sup>

The federal government uses ISTEA money to reimburse states for 80 percent of the cost of their enhancement projects. \$650 million has been distributed during the past three years, and those funds have supported over 2,100 projects nationwide.<sup>92</sup> This funding source has encouraged many communities to review their historic transportation resources and consider how they might be incorporated into their current planning policies:

In rural areas, proponents of rail trails talk of linking communities and reviving dying railroad towns. They see new businesses rising. They discuss the need to preserve a place where people can see the country as it was before we changed so much of it.<sup>93</sup>

The fact that the economies of many of these rail-dependent towns has faltered may actually benefit potential interpretation. Poor conditions for new development often result in the preservation of cultural landscape elements that would otherwise have been lost under normal conditions.

Another significant contribution trails can make to a railroad landscape is by reestablishing the historic ties between small towns that were lost after local rail lines were abandoned. Timothy Dougherty, executive director of Recycling Railroads, summarizes this benefit in the following statement: "A linear piece of land is a unique resource..... Even years after the trains have stopped running and the tracks have been uprooted, a contiguity still exists among the communities along the abandonments."<sup>94</sup> Towns along the Pickering Valley Line were also oriented to the railroad, and when the line was abandoned, the context for the development of these towns was lost. While

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<sup>91</sup> Diana Shaman, "In the Region - Long Island: Tapping U.S. Funds for Beautification," *The New York Times*, 10 October 1993, Sunday Late Edition - Final, Section 10, p. 11, col. 1, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>92</sup> Andrews, 1 December 1994.

<sup>93</sup> Cutter, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Daly, "Rail Buffs Push to Save Old Lines," *The New York Times*, 26 July 1981, Sunday Late City Final Edition, Section 11, New Jersey, p. 30, col. 1, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.



Route 113 still links the towns in a superficial way, the relationship between them is no longer direct or immediately apparent. The approaches to the villages have changed and are re-oriented. Creating a greenway network, which could replicate sections of the former route, would restore a degree of continuity to the surviving elements of that particular landscape.

It is significant to note that previously abandoned corridors, which had become dumping grounds, are now being turned into trails that are frequented not only by residents, but also by visitors who bring with them ready cash to boost local economies. Depots and stations are being converted into rest areas to serve these groups, and in a few cases there is a portion of space devoted to interpreting aspects of local history.

An example is Trotwood, Ohio, which is located along a recently developed rail trail. The town depot which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places had been used as a museum by the historical society, and when the trail opened, the society established a general store in a portion of the building. The store sells local crafts and items featuring historical aspects of Trotwood on T-shirts, mugs, etc. which complement the existing museum exhibits. While this approach to interpretation is rather informal, it appears to be working. According to one member of the historical society, "With the bike trail and our opening the city store, we've had more people in the depot in the last month than we've had in the last 10 years."<sup>95</sup>

Railroad landscapes have great potential for interpretation, because of specialized buildings like these depots and stations and the variety of structures that accompany them. Even when the actual rails and ties are removed for a recreational trail conversion, the smooth grade and subtle shape of the banked rail beds continue to describe the route. Bridges, trestles, flag stations, tunnels, whistle posts, and flumes are all remnants that indicate the path taken by locomotives as they passed through the countryside.

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<sup>95</sup> Martha Hardecastle, "Depot Store Features Trotwood Items," *Dayton Daily News*, 22 June 1994, Northwest Edition, Neighbors sec., p. Z 3-6, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.





Preservationists and historians are now in the process of recognizing the important roles that such support structures play, in addition to those of the actual buildings. In the renovation of the 111 year-old Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis, forces for preservation and recreation once again combined to open up the former railroad bridge to pedestrian traffic.<sup>96</sup> The National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark which spans the Mississippi was closed in the mid-1970's, but has since been reopened as a crucial link in the greater Minneapolis commuter path network. Other less obvious historic resources are dispersed along the tracks as well. Among these are surviving species of native prairie grasses which clung to the strips of land along the rights of way and consequentially avoided being plowed under for crops. Some of these species, which thrived on conditions created by periodic prairie fires, found spots along train lines favorable, because sparks from the locomotives continued the regular cycle of burnings.<sup>97</sup>

#### Potential Benefits of Interpreting Local History in the Context of a Trail System

Rail trail programs have opened up thousands of miles of landscape to the American public, with vistas that run the gamut from scenic to industrial and paths that traverse canyons and cranberry bogs. People can now put on a pair of skates or hop on a bicycle and experience surroundings that were previously restricted to a very few. But is the purpose simply to get a good workout, or are there other benefits to be garnered? Arguably, people should have the chance to know at what they are looking as they move through a landscape. A discussion of why the landscape looks the way it does, what has shaped it, and how our actions today will affect the way it will appear to future generations, needs to be opened. Once such information has been made available to the community, people can be made aware of the process of reading a landscape. Then the

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<sup>96</sup> Steve Brandt, "As Recreational Trails Proliferate Around the Twin Cities Area and Across Minnesota, Monday's Re-Opening of the Historic Stone Arch Bridge Across the Mississippi River Will Provide a Key Link for Bikers, Hikers, and Skaters," *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), 30 October 1994, Metro Edition, News sec., p. 1B, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.

<sup>97</sup> "From Rails to Trails," *Country Journal* 16 (March / April 1989): 23.



opportunity, at least, has been created that will allow people to advocate for intelligent approaches to future land uses in their own communities.

In a speech made by Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual conference last October, one of the key points of discussion was empowering local authority. According to Babbitt, "Our task is not to tell local citizens how to run their affairs or to define for them their sense of place, it is to empower them to decide their own destiny and take on the job of protecting their natural and cultural inheritances."<sup>98</sup> In order for that process to succeed, however, communities must be familiar with the tools that can help them define elemental character of their home landscape. Preservationists should take responsibility for raising the public's consciousness about the environment and begin provided community's with the tools they need to understand historic architecture as well as historic landscapes, which are often unassuming and more difficult to comprehend. Hopefully, this thesis demonstrated that rail trails present an advantageous forum for this type of public education, because they extend across significant stretches of vernacular landscapes and can provide access to an array of physical evidence of past land use.

History can be overwhelming, for it is truly vast. It has a seamless continuity that ebbs and flows with the passage of time. In order to manage an interpretation of local history, one needs an anchor. A rail line can provide such an anchor. Its physical linearity conveys a steady sense of progression through the landscape, and through time as well. It offers boundaries and imposes order on the abstract concept of a cultural landscape. A rail trail route through a given landscape also provides a reference point in time to which historic resources can be compared. Does a particular feature directly relate to the railroad period? Did it exist prior to the railroad's construction? Or was it created because of it, or is it from a much later period? Posing

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<sup>98</sup> Bruce Babbitt, Text of the Speech by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt Before the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Boston, 27 October 1994, Copyright 1994 U.S. Newswire, Inc., available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database.



these basic questions can help a visitor position surviving landscape artifacts within an historical continuum and grasp the evolution of a particular area more readily.

Rail trails need not be limited to the sixty or so feet of publicly owned right of way for their interpretive material. Any feature that can be easily seen from the path could be incorporated into an interpretive program of signage or guide literature. Scenic and industrial views or village and city streets through which a trail might pass are all potential resources. Due to the fact that the property outside the path is privately owned, the landscape remains active and changing. The forces of progress are still at work and that fact should be recognized in the chosen form of interpretation. This strategy of cultural landscape management does not require public ownership of vast amounts of land. Instead, it permits land to remain vital. This strategy makes people aware of this vitality, so that they can become more responsible stewards of the land. This philosophy relates to the concept of education and limited government intervention which characterizes the development of regional heritage areas. In the case of rail trails, however, the scope of the project is of a much smaller scale that can readily be managed on a local level without the complications of an extended bureaucracy.

For many rail trails, the targeted users are local residents, not outside visitors. The trails become community parks with a type of main street atmosphere where people come to see one another and take part in community life.<sup>99</sup> Trails are overwhelmingly seen in a positive light, and for that reason provide a wonderful entrée into a discussion of the preservation of community-valued resources. Because these paths extend public access to the landscape, they give their users a stake in what happens to the land through which the paths run, and issues like open space preservation then take on a new sense of urgency.

Rail trails allow people who lead busy modern lives in urban settings to reconnect with their landscape, which according to Paul Groth, a cultural landscape historian, is a

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<sup>99</sup> Eleanor Chute, "County to Spend \$37,000 on Trail," *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 20 November 1994, Metro sec., p. EW2, available on Lexis / Nexis on-line database. and Brandt, 1B.



real need since, "Americans are probably more intellectually disconnected from their environments than any other group in Western Civilization."<sup>100</sup> These recreational paths create safe, automobile-free zones where one's senses are freed from the usual daily bustle of activity and allowed to focus on the experience of moving through space. Robert Marshall, founder of the Wilderness Society, once said, "When a man travels in the forest by natural means all his capability and all his understanding are called into use, and an infinite number of subtleties which cannot possibly be discovered from the highway, the camp ground, or the house, are clearly appreciated and become significant to him."<sup>101</sup> Rail trails create a perfect environment for this type of traveling and, when combined with a successful interpretive program, they can provide an even greater depth of meaning to those often overlooked subtleties in America's historic landscapes.

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Groth, "Generic Buildings and Cultural Landscapes as Sources of Urban History," *Journal of Architectural Education* 41, no. 3 (spring 1988): 41.

<sup>101</sup> T.H. Watkins, "First, to Walk," *Wilderness* 51 (summer 1988):15.





## Chapter 3

### Farmer, Miller, Industrialist, Visitor: Sculptors Who Shaped the Early Pickering Valley Landscape

The following two chapters will provide a detailed history of the Pickering Valley area focusing on shifting land uses, and the catalysts which brought about those changes. Despite the fact that development of a recreational path through the corridor could not be considered a true rail trail, since the rights of way have already reverted to adjoining property owners, the potential of developing the area as a linear greenway park along the former railroad route remains viable. A study of this area's history provides a valuable opportunity to examine the way in which historic landscapes can be interpreted within the context of a railroad corridor. The railroad route defines the swath of land being examined, and the railroad era between 1871 and 1920 acts as the anchor for a timeline of the area's development with historical events relating to this fixed point in time. Chapter three discusses circumstances prior to the introduction of the railroad.

Historically, the Pickering Valley corridor has been characterized by arable land that was well supplied with water from both the French and the Pickering Creeks. The presence of a reliable water source made the corridor attractive to early settlers who were interested in utilizing it for both agricultural and industrial pursuits. This chapter will explore the way in which these streams, as well as other natural resources, helped shape patterns of settlement in this community from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century.

In their discussions of the American landscape, both John Stilgoe and James Lemon point out the diffused and unplanned character of settlement in the southeastern region of Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Settlers of these rural areas chose not to pursue the security of

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 219, and John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 211.



New England's centrally planned towns, nor did they embrace the formulaic order of William Penn's grid. The individual unit of settlement was the large family farm which was primarily self-sustaining, though dependent upon the surrounding community for specialized goods and services which landowners could not reasonably produce for themselves. This interdependent relationship between farms is what constituted community in this region, not a physical density of structures. The settlement of the Pickering Valley corridor, which covers small parts of Schuylkill and Upper Uwchlan townships and the majority of East and West Pikeland townships in Chester county, followed this general pattern of development. Houses were centrally located within their acreage, and population density was, and still is, quite low. Farms of varied sizes created an uneven patchwork of fences and woodlots within the landscape. This disorder was then rationalized by a network of paths of common use which provided access to local mills and tradesman's services.

If followed, those local roads eventually led to regional transportation arteries situated around the periphery of the corridor. It was these arteries that linked the community to the greater regional area and to the market towns of Lancaster and Philadelphia. It is important to remember, however, that paths have two directions, and that which can lead one person out of a given place offers access to another seeking entrance. Systems of transportation to and from the corridor helped foster two views of the landscape, those of residents who looked at the land as a commodity whose potential should be harnessed and exploited and those of outside visitors who came to partake of the area's "natural beauty" and healthful country atmosphere. Both groups, each with their own values, had a hand in shaping the course of development within the corridor.

A newspaper account from September of 1818 illustrates the way in which ideological views shape one's perception of a landscape. In it a traveler gazes down from a hill near Valley Forge towards the Schuylkill River and notes the "highly improved



townships of Pikeland and Vincent that lie like a carpet before you."<sup>2</sup> Contemplation of the corridor's beauty draws the traveler into a philosophical discourse on the benefits of Republican government which foster "independent freeholders, cultivating their farms in perfect freedom and peace, with no proud tyrant to molest or insult them."<sup>3</sup> For that person, the physical composition of the land has given way to an abstract concept, as they view it from a distance. The independent freeholder on the other end of that description, however, may have had a very different view of the scene. Details that might seem mundane to the traveler such as the water level of a distant stream, could be of great consequence to the farmer. The farmer does not have the luxury of abstraction, but must deal with the land on its own terms and try to create a space for himself and his family within its idiosyncrasies and potential depredations. In turn, the farmer might not set store by the intellectual machinations of the traveler. Each person sees a different truth in the landscape and organizes their perception of the landscape to uphold that vision.

#### The Corridor's Landscape as Ordered by the Farmer

By the time of the 1850 agricultural census, property lines within the corridor had made a considerable shift away from Penn's vision of regular townships oriented to small villages and surrounded by one-hundred to five-hundred acre farms.<sup>4</sup> Villages arose infrequently, and consecutive property owners split large plantation parcels from original grants into many intensively cultivated farms of myriad sizes and configurations. In 1850 there were forty-one farms accounted for in West Pikeland township and seventy-one in East Pikeland township.<sup>5</sup> Roughly twenty to thirty percent of those contained one-hundred acres or more, however, none contained over one-hundred and fifty acres, and it

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<sup>2</sup> *Village Record*, 2 September, 1818.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lemon, 100-101.

<sup>5</sup> When analyzing census data for this area, I am concentrating on listings for East and West Pikeland Townships. The boundaries for the corridor, as I have defined them, extend through the entirety of these two townships, but the corridor itself extends only minimally into Upper Uwchlan and Schuylkill Townships. United States Agricultural Census 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.



was not uncommon to see a farm below twenty acres listed. Available information on acreage and livestock indicates that during the mid-nineteenth century arable farms predominated, but a significant number of modest dairy farms were also listed, and an occasional farm had a notable number of non-"milch cows" indicating the presence of a few grazing farms.<sup>6</sup>

S.W. Johnson's treatise *Rural Economy*, which was printed in 1806, provides information on how a farmer was advised to order the physical landscape to create a farm best suited to its intended use. Though patterns of cultivation were often driven by culture and tradition, such treatises provided a forum for the discussion of new agricultural concepts. According to Johnson, a farm's use would determine the composition of land types, the number of hands needed to maintain it, and the accommodations necessary for those hands. A grazing farm was the least labor intensive, with an arable farm ranking higher on the scale, and a dairy farm being the most demanding of all, since it combined both cultivation and grazing.<sup>7</sup>

Property sale notices of the time generally described farms in terms of their relevant component parts, and by analyzing early nineteenth century listings in the Pikeland Township area, patterns of use emerge. A listing for a forty acre farm situated in Pikeland Township illustrates a standard composition of land use for the area. In addition to improvements, this farm includes: "a young orchard, and a reasonable proportion of meadow; the land is all of excellent quality, in a high state of cultivation, well fenced and watered, and has a reasonable proportion of timber..."<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of an orchard, meadow, cultivated land, and timber on such a relatively small farm indicates that it is probably an arable farm suited to generalized cultivation, not a specialized

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<sup>6</sup> 14% of farms in East and West Pikeland Townships had over 10 milk cows listed, but many farms supported only 3 or 4 milk cows. United States Agricultural Census for 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.

<sup>7</sup> S.W. Johnson, *Rural Economy: Containing a Treatise on Pise Building; On Building in General; On The Culture of the Vine; and on Turnpike Roads* (New Brunswick, NJ: I. Riley and Company, 1806), 89.

<sup>8</sup> *American Republican*, 6 July 1825.





market-driven property like a dairy or grazing farm. Another property in the township of West Pikeland, however, specifies itself as a dairy farm with certain improvements which support that function:

"The improvements for dairying are a large spring house over a never failing spring, a stone tenant house with four rooms close by the spring, a large cow shed, large enough for a dairy of cows, pig pens, and ice house convenient to the spring and everything in complete order for a dairy farm."<sup>9</sup>

The notation of the tenant house supports Johnson's perception that dairy farms were more labor intensive than other farm types and required additional workers to maintain. An extensive litany of accouterments, such as that listed above, did not appear to be a national standard.

A travel account from 1818 discusses the differences between New England's dairies and those of Chester county. According to this account, preservation of milk was handled more conscientiously in Pennsylvania than it was in New England. It appears that this person's opinion was based in great part on their observation of large numbers of spring houses in the region of Chester county where "a stone spring house is considered an almost indispensable appurtenant to every well-improved farm. There (New England) a spring house is rarely seen."<sup>10</sup> In this case, natural resources in the form of springs, which served to cool the milk house, and the streams, that supplied ice for year-round use, made quantifiable contributions to the development of the local economy.

Water is also critical to agricultural production, and the "never failing" French and Pickering creeks assured that local fields were well-watered. Historically, rye, wheat, oats, barley and Indian corn were planted through the eighteenth century to produce meal

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<sup>9</sup> *Village Record*, 28 October 1865.

<sup>10</sup>*Village Record*, 2 September 1818.





Fig. 26 Spring house in Kimberton, East Pikeland Township.  
•Located behind the Kimberton mill at the intersection of Hare's Hill and Kimberton Roads.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 27 Spring House in Upper Uwehlan Township on the Stiteler family property along Byers Road.  
•Note the configuration of the structures in the domestic compound.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



and flour for the family and feed for the livestock.<sup>11</sup> The 1850 census reveals a similar trend, though the incidence of barley is negligible and that of rye quite low.<sup>12</sup> Rapid transformation of the landscape combined with uninformed agricultural practices to drastically deplete the local soil of its nutrients and cause farmers to move on to new fields by the latter years of the eighteenth century. The use of lime plaster as a fertilizer was introduced to the area by Philip Rapp in 1788, and it proved to be very successful when used in conjunction with crop rotation.<sup>13</sup> Sale notices for better farms touted their "well limed fields," while others cited proximity to limestone deposits or the presence of an on-site lime kiln. To provide some idea as to the amount of lime being used in this region, an 1825 notice tells of a 165 acre farm onto which had been put, "9,000 bushels of lime within eight years past."<sup>14</sup> It is likely that such large amounts of lime could have been acquired fairly easily, since there were 17 lime kilns operating in East Whiteland township just below Pikeland which provided 204,000 bushels of lime a year during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Farms in this area do not appear to have been growing produce for market at this time. No farms in either East or West Pikeland show any valuation for "produce of market gardens" in the 1850 Agricultural Census.<sup>16</sup> Due to the poor condition of local roads, and the relative distance of most of these farms from turnpikes leading to even

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<sup>11</sup> Lemon, 156. In his book *Flora Cestricea*, William Darlington states that Zea Mays ranks "at least in this region (Chester County) next in importance to wheat." William Darlington, *Flora Cestricea: An Attempt to Enumerate and Describe the Flowering and Filicoid Plants of Chester County in the State of Pennsylvania* (West Chester, PA: S. Siegfried, 1837), 94.

<sup>12</sup> In his *Geography of Pennsylvania*, Trego gives the following profile describing a typical planting treatment for a field: 1) The land is plowed early in the spring. 2) Indian corn is planted in May and harvested in October. 3) The next spring the field is plowed and planted with oats which are harvested in July. 4) The stubble from the harvest is plowed into the soil which is sown with wheat in September. 5) In February clover is sown among the wheat. 6) The wheat is harvested in July. 7) The clover is left in the fields until the next summer when it is cut for hay. 8) A second crop of clover is gathered in September for seed. 9) The land is pastured until it is ready for Indian corn again. Charles B. Trego, *A Geography of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Edward C. Biddle, 1843), 111.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker, *Annals of Phoenixville and its Vicinity* (Philadelphia: Bavis and Pennypacker, Printers, 1872), 80.

<sup>14</sup> *American Republican*, 26 December 1825.

<sup>15</sup> *Village Record*, 2 September 1818.

<sup>16</sup> United States Agricultural Census for 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania. United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.





more distant market towns, garden produce would have been meant primarily for family sustenance, not for regional sale.<sup>17</sup> It is also interesting to note that by the mid-nineteenth century, local production of flax and hemp, important domestic crops of the eighteenth century, has almost vanished. This is probably due to the industrialization of the textile industry and improved regional trade which allowed farm families to purchase cloth more reasonably than they could produce it for themselves.

A sale notice for a farm in Pikeland township from 1816 describes the land as being "well adapted to grain and grass,"<sup>18</sup> indicating the other crop component of farms in the area. It is common to see "fields well set with timothy and clover" mentioned through the mid-nineteenth century. In his work *Flora Cestrica*, a botanical catalogue of plants in Chester county, William Darlington extols the virtues of timothy as "one of the most valuable grasses known to farmers" which when combined with red clover, "a most valuable plant; and diligently cultivated by all good farmers," produces one of the best qualities of hay.<sup>19</sup> Darlington does point out, however, that both timothy and red clover are not native to the area and have been essentially naturalized. Clover mills used to separate the seed head from the chaff continued to be operated in the Pickering Valley area into the mid-nineteenth century, although the production of clover seed for sale as listed in the 1850 census appeared to be very limited.

Apple orchards replaced native stands of trees. According to Samuel Pennypacker, apples were abundant in the area throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and "a cider press could be found upon almost every farm for the manufacture

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<sup>17</sup> Their situation is not dissimilar to that of Crevecoeur in New York during the late eighteenth century who commented: "Were we not to consume all these articles which are farms produce; were they not converted into some pleasant food, they would be lost. What should we do with our fruit, our fowls, our eggs? There is no market for these articles but in the neighborhood of great towns." St. John de Crevecoeur, *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America: More "Letters from an American Farmer*, Henri L. Bourdin, Ralph Gabriel, and Stanley T. Williams, eds. (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1972), 124. The nearest town of any size around 1850 was Phoenixville, which was a manufacturing town with a limited population. Lancaster and Philadelphia were a full day trip each way, therefore it would only have been profitable to cultivate market crops on a scale larger than that of a mere garden.

<sup>18</sup> *American Republican*, 20 August 1816.

<sup>19</sup> William Darlington, 59 and 406.





of cider, of which vast quantities were consumed at home, and a beverage was also distilled from the fruit to be sold."<sup>20</sup> The presence of other types of fruit trees on farms were occasionally mentioned, although they were not specified as to number or variety. According to Crevecoeur's account of growing apples in New York, farmers often could not process the large amounts of apples with which they were deluged at harvest time. His solution to the dilemma of dealing with this surplus was to let the hogs run wild in the orchards.<sup>21</sup> Those apples which were harvested but not used for cider were often dried for winter use, though the drying process of putting the peeled slices on a makeshift scaffold and allowing the "bees wasps and sucking flies of the neighborhood" to aid in the drying process makes the end product seem less appetizing today.

The arrangement of fields was driven by the need to obtain the most efficient use of labor and produce the highest crop yields. "Conveniently divided fields" was a catch phrase used commonly in sale notices.<sup>22</sup> Farmland was divided into manageable pieces with descriptions of better properties noting that fields were also "well fenced." Choice of fence construction in the corridor varied over time and with the predilection and financial condition of the farmer. There are references to worm fences as late as 1831, however, it appears that by that period, neater versions of rail fencing were becoming more popular. The following are references found in sale notices for Pikeland township: 1831- "The road was bordered in most places by flat rails neatly fitted into upright posts, though in others the rails were laid in a zigzag manner forming what are technically known as worm fences;"<sup>23</sup> 1834 - "1700 panels of post have been recently put in,"<sup>24</sup> in reference to a farm around Yellow Springs; 1825 - "The remainder has been divided into small fields

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<sup>20</sup> Pennypacker, 181.

<sup>21</sup> Crevecoeur, 102.

<sup>22</sup> The size of the fields into which the land is divided are rarely listed, however, there was one farm whose seventeen acres were described as being "divided among five small fields." This approximate 3.5 acre size provides a useful reference benchmark. *American Republican*, 26 December 1815.

<sup>23</sup> *American Republican*, 27 December 1831.

<sup>24</sup> *American Republican*, 23 December 1831.



all under chestnut rail;"<sup>25</sup> and lastly, a parcel described in 1815 as being "under good fences, part of stone and part rails."<sup>26</sup> Although most of the corridor's early housing stock is built of local stone, stone fences do not appear to have been prevalent in the area.

Fences were erected to both protect crops and pen domesticated livestock. As was mentioned earlier, many households retained several milk cows to supply the family with dairy products and perhaps produce a small surplus of butter that could later be sold. Horses were even more critical to farmers in this area than cows were, not only because they were used in the fields, but also because they were also the main source of transportation other than walking. According to Jack Larkin, the during the period from 1790 to 1840 the United States population's dependence on oxen for draft animals lessened and horses became work animals of choice.<sup>27</sup> This assertion is confirmed by the 1850 census data for East and West Pikeland townships. During that year, less than 7% of farms employed working oxen, and several of those listings were for large numbers of oxen implying that the farmers were also employed as drovers. On the other hand 93% of households had at least one horse, and many listed at least three or four. Trego's *Geography of Pennsylvania* of 1843 also discusses attempts of farmers in the region to improve livestock stating that "horses have generally been bred more with a view to the draught than to swiftness, in accordance with the quiet pursuits of their owners, who prefer the sure speed of the plough and the wagon."<sup>28</sup>

Livestock also contributed to the farmer's table. In the mid-eighteenth century, Gottlieb Mittelberger, a visiting German, noted with surprise that, "In this province, even in the humblest or poorest houses, no meals are served without the meat course; and no one eats bread without butter or cheese...I do not believe that any country consumes more

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<sup>25</sup> *American Republican*, 16 November 1825.

<sup>26</sup> *American Republican*, 26 December 1815.

<sup>27</sup> Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life 1790-1840* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1988), 215.

<sup>28</sup> Trego, 112.



meat than Pennsylvania."<sup>29</sup> James Lemon's study of Lancaster and Chester county wills shows that pork was the most common meat consumed in the area during the late eighteenth century followed closely by beef.<sup>30</sup> Census data for this area shows that farms generally had a small herd of swine ranging in number from six to twenty and often retained some cattle that were not used for milk production. Each farm was also evaluated on the value of livestock slaughtered. The values ranged from a low end of \$25 to a high of \$299, implying that meat consumption varied considerably over the size and relative prosperity of the farm.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to cultivated and meadow lands, farms generally retained a certain portion of the acreage which was devoted to timber. Domestication of the landscape had begun in earnest by the late eighteenth century. In 1750, Mittelberger extolled the land around Philadelphia as having good soil, air, and water, and took special note of the surrounding woods, some of which remained uninhabited with "natural forest through which flow many small and large rivers."<sup>32</sup> Not long afterwards, rich soil and abundant water drew settlers into the Pickering Valley area. An 1843 geography of Pennsylvania shows how the myth of the sublime American wilderness had been usurped by a very different vision:

This (Chester County) is one of the finest agricultural districts in the State, and by the enterprise and industry of the intelligent farmers who inhabit it, has been made to present a beautiful and luxuriant picture of *neatness, order, and productive prosperity* of Pennsylvania husbandry.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1960), 49.

<sup>30</sup> Lemon, 155.

<sup>31</sup> United States Agricultural Census 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.

<sup>32</sup> Mittelberger, 43. Mittelberger did mention the decrease of wildfowl and game in the Philadelphia area "since everybody is allowed to shoot what he wants," but also remarked that a better variety of wildlife could be found "the further one penetrates into the country" where it is less inhabited. The boundaries of habitation, however, continued to spread and eventually encompassed the Pickering Valley area. Mittelberger, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Trego, 212.





Fig. 28 Open Meadows and wood lot in West Pikeland Township on Kimberton Road.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 29 Chester County Farmstead on Byers Road in Upper Uwchlan Township.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.





In 1831, a person traveling through Pikeland between West Chester and Paoli described the land in the following manner, "The country, too, much of it is cleared, but there are occasional forests that extend for some distance."<sup>34</sup> These forests were probably remaining timber stands from which farmers took their fuel, fencing material, and building supplies.<sup>35</sup>

The contrast of forests to fields must have been quite striking to those traveling along the slow country roads. The interplay of texture and colors must surely have created a tangible pattern, characterized by the way in which the residents chose to manipulate existing landscape conditions in a way that would meet their needs. Today that contrast has been blurred, fields have fallen out of agricultural use and are gradually being reclaimed by the woodlots, but with a careful eye the document of this historic landscape can still be read. A somewhat less transient component of this corridor's cultural landscape is the housing stock. Though not impervious to neglect, the stone structures of this area, when they do survive, provide a direct link to past human experience. For many people, it is easier to relate to an historic building than to attempt to read an historic landscape unassisted. These houses are the fixtures around which human ordering of the landscape revolved and continues to revolve.

In his treatise on rural economy, Johnson recommends that the farmhouse be located on the healthiest spot on the farm, away from low lying areas, open to the southern breezes and sheltered from the north by natural growth or design. A travel account from the early nineteenth century relates that many of Chester county's "well-built handsome stone houses" were shaded with poplars and willows.<sup>36</sup> The treatise also

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<sup>34</sup> *American Republican*, 27 December 1831.

<sup>35</sup> Trego mentions that although the county is well supplied with timber for "domestic purposes," there are locations (probably mostly in the vicinity of the furnaces) where timber is less abundant and coal carried up the Schuylkill Canal is beginning to be used as an alternate fuel. Trego, 215.

Crevecoeur describes the time and labor it takes to procure fire wood for rural farms "One year with another I burn seventy loads, this is pretty nearly so many cords. Judge of the time and trouble it requires to fell it in the woods; the haul it home either in wagons or sleighs, besides recutting it at the wood-pile fit for the length of each chimney." Crevecoeur, 144.

<sup>36</sup> *Village Record*, 2 September 1818.



states that the house should be situated in the central part of the farm, so as to make travel to the farthest fields most efficient.<sup>37</sup> In the Pickering Valley, better quality houses were constructed of stone, a material also often used for barns for increased permanency and for spring houses to combat rot. Houses on less valuable parcels were more likely to be of hewn logs. In an 1825 sale notice, it is not surprising to find that a "comfortable log dwelling" is situated on a parcel of land "in a middling state of cultivation."<sup>38</sup> This points out the continual evolution of the landscape of this corridor whose native qualities gave way to those of human habitation. As the middling parcels became "well cultivated" the landscape evolved, and with this evolution came improvement in the quality of life for those inhabiting the land and the quality of their structures. The use of brick as a building material within this corridor is rarely mentioned, and frame structures are referred to with greater frequency as the nineteenth century progresses.<sup>39</sup>

Among Johnson's most interesting insights is the fact that the house should have a separate building for "a brew house, storehouse for meal, dairy, workshop, or other convenience."<sup>40</sup> This statement points out the importance of the support buildings on a farm. Shelter, a primary need, is provided by the farm house for people and by the stables or barn for the livestock, but there is a second tier of these smaller work buildings that play a pivotal role in the operation of a farm and give further order to the landscape. Indeed, the domestic complex created a type of independent village in this region of independent and isolated freeholders. Extended families, tenants, and apprentices were the sole inhabitants, and work gave definition to an assortment of spaces and structures.

A great variety of support buildings are listed in sale notices for this area. Among the most common are spring houses and wagon houses. The variety of other listed

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<sup>37</sup> Johnson, 89.

<sup>38</sup> *Village Record*, 4 January 1825.

<sup>39</sup> The only reference to a brick structure I have located is the construction of the new Eagle Tavern in Eagle, PA at the western end of this corridor which was erected in 1859. *American Republican*, 6 September 1859.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, p. 89.



improvements points to the widespread incidence of cottage industry that was practiced in conjunction with agricultural pursuits in these rural areas. Included among these are: wheel-wright shops, smith shops, hog houses, ice houses, lime kilns, joiner shops, distilleries, and grist and saw mills. These last two structures mark the transition into another level of landscape organization - land shaped by early industry or artifice as contrasted with land shaped by man's physical toil.

#### The Corridor's Landscape as Ordered by the Miller

Flowing water nurtures industry as well as agriculture, and construction of mills occurred gradually along the flowing meanders of the French and Pickering Creeks. While the farmers tamed the land, millers and machinists sought to harness the streams to aid in processing the raw materials brought to them from the surrounding countryside. In his discussion of early mills and millers, John Stilgoe focuses on their adversarial relationships with the local communities which they served.<sup>41</sup> A poem from a later period published in Philadelphia's *The Evening Fireside or Weekly Intelligence*, however, presents a far different picture of the miller. It appears to have been written during a period when settlers were no longer cowering in fear of the wilderness, but instead were confident in the ability of technology to overcome it. The following excerpts from "A Poem on Chiltren Mill" by an unnamed author illustrate the critical role the mill is seen to play in taming the land:

Whirl on ye mills, nor let your fame descend,  
Till copious fields in wilder bounds extend,  
Till barren lands with rising verdure spring,  
Till useless woods with sounding axes ring,  
Till burrs on burrs the foaming peak shall feel,  
And every stream be pour'd into a wheel.

For you, the seeds industrious farmers sow,  
And dusty smiths the roaring bellows blow,  
Carts, drays, and waggons shall your works employ,  
And hardy drivers smack the whips for joy....

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<sup>41</sup> Stilgoe, 300.



Go on, ye mills, and all ye millers hail,  
May all your plans and honest schemes prevail,  
Protecting states shall lend their helping laws,  
And hungry poets glory in the cause.<sup>42</sup>

I believe this to be an accurate portrayal of the type of relationship which the farmers of the Pickering Valley would have had with their millers during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Stilgoe's discussion of the aura of mystery that surrounds mills, because of their location outside community boundaries, is more clearly applicable to New England towns than to the villages in this region.

The decentralization of settlement throughout southeastern Pennsylvania fostered the creation mills that were not unlike the standard farms which surrounded them, with the exception that the location had been provided with a good mill-seat.<sup>43</sup> Millers often farmed as well as running their mill. Many property owners in the area aggressively promoted the availability of water power on their farms in their advertised sale notices. On one farm, an additional attraction was a still-house "with a good mill seat with a sufficient head and fall and plenty of water to do all the chopping for the distillery."<sup>44</sup> Another touted the flexibility of water power, because although their property does not have a mill structure, it does have, "a substantial dam erected with a head and tail race, and always sufficient water for either a paper mill, oil mill, carding machine or fulling mill."<sup>45</sup> In fact, mills in this region were actually less isolated than many of the surrounding farms, because roads were brought to them, therefore they had ready access to a transportation network. I have not found, however, any indication that either the

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<sup>42</sup> B.B., "A Poem on Chiltren Mill," *The Evening Fireside or Weekly Intelligence* 1 (May 1805): 212.

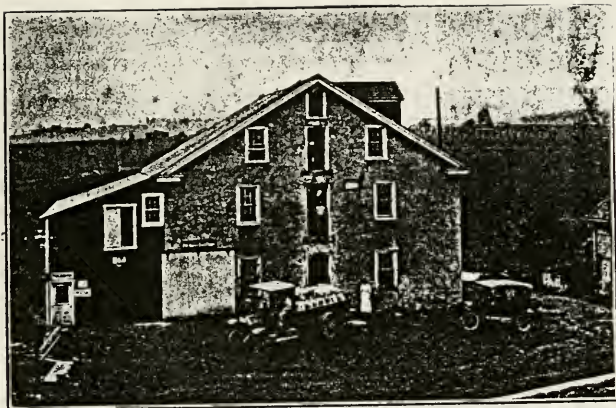
<sup>43</sup> Sale notices for grist and saw mills show that they are not generally independent entities, but part of a regular farm. These include: A 107 acre farm in Pikeland township with standard improvements (house, barn, spring house, etc.) which also includes a grist and saw mill. *American Republican*, 12 October 1825.; A 44 acre farm also in the Pikeland area with plowland, meadow land, and an orchard with a stone house and a grist and saw mill. *American Republican*, 15 August 1815.; and another 50 acre parcel consists of meadow land and woodland and a two story dwelling house with a saw mill in disrepair. *American Republican*. 16 November 1825.

<sup>44</sup> *American Republican*, 31 October 1826.

<sup>45</sup> *American Republican*, 18 October 1815.







THE KIMBERTON FLOUR MILL.

Fig. 30 "The Kimberton Flour Mill," no date given.  
Photograph Collection, Mills-East Pikeland Township-Kimberton Flour Mill, Chester  
County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Kimberton, Pa., *July 1884* 1874

*Mr. Buffington*

To **W. F. BUFFINGTON, Jr.**

**ROYAL SPRING MILLS,**

DEALER IN FLOUR, FEED AND GRAIN.

*Kimberton, Pa. New York 1889*

*Mr. Lewis Egglin*

**JOHN PRIZER, Jr.**

MANUFACTURER OF

**CHOICE ROLLER FLOUR, FEED & C.**

Terms:

◀ KIMBERTON FLOUR MILLS ▶

*Kimberton, Pa., April 8<sup>th</sup> 1885*

*Mr. J. Fred Scheiden*



**DAVID G. GABEL, PROP'R.**

DEALER IN

**FLOUR, GRAIN AND FEED**

Terms: \_\_\_\_\_

Fig. 31 Three letterheads for Kimberton flour mills 1874-1889. Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



French or Pickering Creeks were ever utilized for navigation. It does not appear that they were a part of the area's transportation network.

Grist and saw mills answered a farmer's most basic processing needs, flour for his family, seed for crops, feed for livestock, perhaps a surplus of grain for sale, and a supply of building material. Mills were among a community's first industries, and through them, the continued settlement and transformation of the landscape was fostered. According to James Lemon's analysis of the economy of this region, wheat was milled locally, and mills were scattered liberally throughout the county.<sup>46</sup> Tax records for Pikeland township in 1767 indicate that there were already four grist mills and five saw mills in operation at that time.<sup>47</sup> Milling operations remained fixtures in this corridor throughout the nineteenth century. The 1820 manufacturing census for Chester county reported that flour had a total market value of \$60,830, the highest value of all manufactured products in the area.<sup>48</sup> Although milling technology eventually made the transition to steam power, it was the quantity of water and quality of the mill seats which enabled the initial construction of mills in this corridor and provided a foundation for the introduction of light industry to the area.

The quality of a mill seat was in many ways dependent on the condition of existing natural topography, which could be molded by the millwright into the most efficient source of power. The topography shaped the placement of the mill's head and tail races, the positioning of the mill house, and the location of the dam.<sup>49</sup> A good millwright had to be able to work to nature's best advantage, because the operation of a mill relied on the coordination of a myriad of variables each of which could be easily stalled by uncooperative natural forces. Often times, once a good mill seat was secured,

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<sup>46</sup> Lemon, 207.

<sup>47</sup> Pikeland Township Tax Records, 1767, Chester County Archives, West Chester, PA.

<sup>48</sup> United States Manufacturing Census for 1820, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch. Other leading manufacturing products included: bar iron, \$55,250; cotton yarn, \$56,455; leather, \$34,740; and rolled iron, \$19,000.

<sup>49</sup> Oliver Evans, *The Young Millwright and Miller's Guide* (Philadelphia, 1795), 275.





Fig. 32 Photograph of the mill pond at the Lightfoot Mill in Anselma, West Pikeland Township. Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 33 Photograph of the abandoned mill race at the Lightfoot Mill. Photograph by the author, 1994.









Fig. 34 Photograph of the entire structure of the Lightfoot Mill.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



and assuming a sufficient supply of water permitted it, several races could be diverted from the stream to run a number of mills in a given area, each one dedicated to a separate operation. The way in which millwrights sculpted the land around a mill can still be seen at Lightfoot's Mill near the western edge of the corridor in the village of Anselma. This is the site of the township's oldest mill dating to 1747.<sup>50</sup> The eighteenth century stone mill house remains, and though the races have long since been closed their gentle ravines and a small mill pond survive under the cover of underbrush nearby.

The mills described in the 1850 manufacturing census for Pikeland township consist primarily of the overshot wheel type with an occasional undershot wheel mill or breast wheel mill. The rolling character of the topography enabled many millers to gain the height and fall needed to construct overshot wheel mills which were considered to be the most efficient type, due to the fact that they combined the force of water with the power of gravity. In his book, *The Young Millwright and Miller's Guide*, Oliver Evans notes that undershot wheels "are only half as powerful as other wheels that are moved by the gravity of the water. Therefore, this construction ought not be adopted, except where there is but little fall, or great plenty of water."<sup>51</sup> Evans recommended breast wheel mills, in which the water strikes the wheel at a tangential angle, for those seats which did not have sufficient fall for an overshot wheel mill, nor a powerful enough flow of water to suit the percussive nature of an undershot wheel mill.<sup>52</sup>

In 1850, the two local breast wheel mills were John Thomas's clover mill and H.J. Snyder's oil (linseed) mill, and the one undershot wheel mill was located at James L. Williams Edge Tool Factory. All three of these were located in East Pikeland township.

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<sup>50</sup> Estelle Cremers, *30,000 Acres: Vincent and Pikeland Townships 1686 to 1850* (Philadelphia: Eastern Litho Corporation, 1989), 73.

<sup>51</sup> Evans, 154. In 1806 this book was lauded in the periodical *Medical Repository* for its contribution to the "mechanic arts." Since it was published in Philadelphia and remained a standard reference in the field of milling, it is likely that millers in the Pickering Valley area would have had access to its information. "Evan's Improvements in the Machinery of Mills," *Medical Repository* 10 (Aug.-Oct. 1806), 212.

<sup>52</sup> Evans, 170.



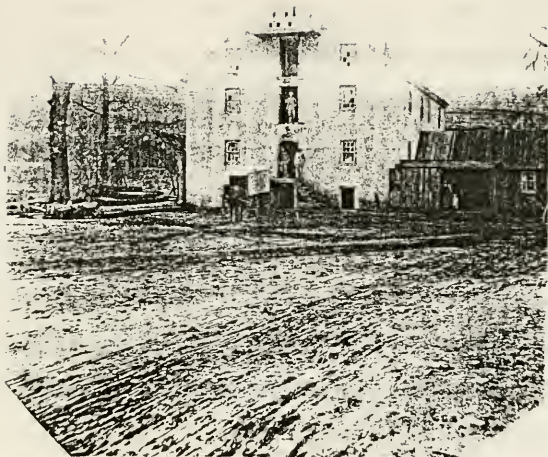


Fig. 35 Pennypacker and Son Woolen Mill, East Pikeland Township.  
 Photograph Collection, East Pikeland Township - Mills - Pennypacker and Son,  
 Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

AR 5.31. 1836

**PICKERING CREEK  
 WOOLEN  
 FACTORY.**

THE subscriber takes this method of infor-  
 ming his friends and the public at large  
 that he has taken the above mentioned facto-  
 ry, one mile south east of the Yellow Springs,  
 where he intends carrying on the Woolen  
 Manufacturing in all its various branches, viz:  
 Such as Cloths, Sattinets, Flannels, Blankets,  
 &c. and card wool into rolls to suit customers.  
 Merino wool will be taken and manufactured  
 to the shares.

5,31,36 C. S. DAVIS.

Pikeland, May 17. 1836. 3173

N. B.—Wool will be taken in at Jesse  
 Kerns' store, West Chester, and returned  
 every two weeks, also at Edward S. Davis'  
 mills on Birch Run, and returned every week  
 from the 1st of June until the 1st of Septem-  
 ber.

Fig. 36 Advertisement for the Pickering Creek Woolen Factory near Yellow Springs  
 in West Pikeland Township.  
*American Republican*, 31 May 1836, Newspaper Clipping File, West Pikeland - Business  
 Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Due to the fact that these mills were involved in a more specialized type of processing, which would have developed at a later date, it might be presumed that the best mill seats in the area had already been taken by established grist and saw mills. New industry might, therefore, have been forced to utilize the less attractive sites that remained. The power provided by the French and Pickering Creeks facilitated the development of local, small manufacturing centers. These manufactories produced goods which met the needs of the surrounding community, as well as a limited quantity of items for outside sale. According to the 1850 census Jacob Clevenstine of East Pikeland worked as a machinist, utilizing water power in his production of plows, horse shoes and general repairing; Benjamin Hartman's clover mill was among several erected to meet the demand for clover seed and chop, and H.J. Snyder's mill processed loose flax seed into linseed oil which could be used in the manufacture of paint.<sup>53</sup> West Pikeland had its own retinue of basic mill types, but it was also home to two textile processing mills. These mills harnessed locally available water power to operate their spindles, looms, warping mills, and carding machines. The A.B. Culton Company made carpeting and the Joseph Marshall factory produced carpet, cloth, and stocking yarn.<sup>54</sup>

With the exception of the A.B. Culton Company which employed sixty men and seven women, none of these mills became major employers.<sup>55</sup> Generally they were

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<sup>53</sup> Clover mills were in high demand for a period, and in 1826 Thomas Burrell invented a new way to thresh and clean the clover which supposedly did not crush the seed or create as much dust as other processes. The method was patented, and the use of the patent in Pennsylvania was procured by a Philadelphia investor named D.K. Jones. Jones chose the village of Kimberton in East Pikeland as a trial location where agriculturists could come and view the machinery. *American Republican*, 8 February 1826.

<sup>54</sup> These two companies are listed in the 1850 Manufacturing Census, however an even earlier woolen mill which produced fulled wool, flannel, and blankets is listed in the less complete 1820 Agricultural Census. In fact this woolen mill was the only manufactory noted for all of Pikeland township at that time. United States Manufacturing Census for 1820 and 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.

A number of "taylors" producing hundreds of coats a piece appear on the 1850 listing, it is not apparent what their relationship is to the woolen factories. They could be using locally made wool or wool imported from Philadelphia.

<sup>55</sup> United States Manufacturing Census 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.





operated by two or three people, and the work was probably intermittent. The presence of the mills, however, made raw materials like lumber locally accessible at a reasonable cost. The other significant raw material located in this area, though not to the extent of townships like Coventry further north, were deposits of iron ore. Iron was one of Chester county's leading manufactures during this period, and the Pickering Valley area had several mines which were already in operation by 1850. The Reeves, Buck and Company employed ten people to work in four local mines: Stiteler's, Friday's, Fagley's, and Deez's mines, where the company had the privilege of removing ore. Over 6,000 tons of ore were removed from West Pikeland in 1850.<sup>56</sup> By the late-nineteenth century, steam began to be used to power the machinery needed for ore extraction, although smaller, independent mining operators like Enoch Jones of West Pikeland continued to remove it by hand.

Access to materials was especially important before the 1830's and the opening of the Schuylkill Navigation. The availability of lumber, for instance, made it possible for wheelwrights, coach makers, cabinet makers, machinists, and coopers to locate in the area and have access both to materials and a growing market.<sup>57</sup> The presence of the craftsmen in turn promoted the harvesting of local resources above and beyond what was already required by the base domestic needs of existing farmers. Joshua Hoffnecker, a carpenter, required 50,000 feet of lumber for his production of two stone houses and one stone barn. The same was required by John Moses, another carpenter, for a stone house and a frame house. Several other carpenters and wheelwrights were working in the area, along with carriage makers and others like blacksmiths who used smaller amounts of wood. The human activity and dynamism which came to characterize the Pickering Valley in the

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<sup>56</sup> United States Manufacturing Census 1850, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch. The listing for West Pikeland township's ore production is: Reeves, Buck and Co. 3,516 tons of ore, Enoch Jones 772 tons of ore, and Philip Fagley 2,145 tons of ore.

<sup>57</sup> All of these were occupations listed in the 1850 Manufacturing Census for the Pikeland area.



early-nineteenth century sped up nature's gradual process of succession as the wilderness was ordered at the hands of man.

The pace of life was changing, farms had developed past subsistence level, and the population continued to grow. Perhaps the clearest indicators of the upgrade in quality of life for this area would be the appearance of Mary Haven, a milliner, on the 1850 Manufacturing Census; the advertisements placed by Henry Olwine's clock repair shop in 1814; and those of George Binder, cabinet maker, who could provide an interested family with a "field column mahogany secretary" perhaps even in exchange for a suitable quantity of bedstuff.<sup>58</sup> The fact that the community had developed to a point that it could afford, not only to purchase such luxury items, but actually sustain several craftspeople, indicates that it had attained a new level of prosperity. No one became rich off the process, because manufacturing at that time was concentrated on serving limited local needs. Nevertheless, it did push forward the evolution of the landscape adding another layer of civility onto the existing foundations of settlement. A new sense of order began to shape the hillsides: farms situated along the body and crests of the hills were punctuated with fences, houses, and woodlots, and in the valley were located the water sources which drove this evolution in the form of mills, manufactures, and tradesmen's shops.

#### The Corridor's Landscape as Ordered by Industry

Two types of mills which operated on the eastern edge of the corridor were linked to regional production and exportation, rather than addressing local needs. One was the powder mill near what later became Phoenixville along the French Creek. The mill was established during the revolutionary era to provide gun powder for the continental troops in the region. Also included in the complex were gun making facilities, a blacksmith's

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<sup>58</sup> United States Manufacturing Census 1850, Chester County, PA, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch. and *American Republican*, 17 May 1814. and *Register and Examiner*, 26 February 1839.



French Creek near Kimberton, Chester Co., Pa.  
The Drying House Powder Mill of the Continental Congress.



Fig. 37 Postcard illustrating "The Drying House Powder Mill of the Continental Congress," no date given.  
Newspaper Clipping File, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 38 Surviving remnants of the Snyder Mill on the site of the Continental Powder Works in East Pikeland Township including the mill house and the mill race.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.





Fig. 39 The site of Rapp's Dam on the French Creek.  
•The dam supplied water power for Snyder's Mill and earlier mills operating at the same location.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.







shop, and barracks for the soldiers who operated the powderworks.<sup>59</sup> The mill, one of several Pickering Valley structures with revolutionary ties, was completed during the winter of 1776 but had a short life span. It was decimated by a major explosion shortly after completion and was eventually overrun by the British.<sup>60</sup> After the war, the mill seat was returned to non-military use for several decades, and in 1855 it was purchased by Levi Oberholtzer who revived the mill's tradition of powdermaking. Until another debilitating explosion racked the structure, it produced about 5,500 pounds of blasting powder a month. The powder was primarily sold to mining concerns and was the only mill of its kind in Chester county during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

The iron works established at the mouth of the French Creek where it emptied into the Schuylkill River would eventually become the most significant manufacturing town in the corridor. Its development serves as a contrast to that of the central section of the corridor where agricultural production was the primary focus, and dispersed settlement continued to be the rule. The site where James Starr first erected his grist mill in 1732 was improved with time. A saw mill was added, and in 1785 Benjamin Longstreth improved the dam and the races and added an iron rolling and slitting mill. With this machinery in place, he began production of cut nails which would be sold throughout the region.<sup>62</sup> Iron processing in various forms continued to dominate the site well into the twentieth century, and as a consequence, it re-shaped the adjacent landscape on a massive scale.

Louis Wernwag, the notable engineer, took over management of the site in 1802, expanding its scope and renaming it Phoenix Iron Works. He developed housing near the mills for local workers, and gradually a small mill-centered village emerged. A description of the site in 1824 tells of a small village whose activity was centered around

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<sup>59</sup> Pennypacker, 94.

<sup>60</sup> Cremers, 91.

<sup>61</sup> *Jeffersonian*, 5 February, 1859.

<sup>62</sup> Pennypacker, 133.



fifty-four nail machines that could produce as much as forty tons of iron nails a week. Other village fixtures included a grist mill, a store and a school house.<sup>63</sup> The site was advantageous for such a venture, because locally available resources in the form of water power, ore, and fuel were still plentiful. The mill also had access to bar iron from several furnaces in the northern part of Chester county. An 1850 travel account discusses local sources for the mill's iron as comprising, "immense beds of iron ore which were discovered in Warwick, near St. Mary's Church, and the iron mines in the *Pikelands* and the Vincents, from which the Phoenix Works obtain large amounts."<sup>64</sup>

The mill's location on the Schuylkill River also provided an efficient, cost-effective transportation system for the company's goods once the Schuylkill Canal opened, significantly increasing the river's navigability.<sup>65</sup> Citizens like William J. Duane, heavily promoted the concept of using canals as a transportation infrastructure for the state of Pennsylvania. In a tract written on the subject, he noted that canals increase the value of land through which they pass, enable the development of industry by providing an inexpensive way of transporting fuel to the site, and provide cost-effective transportation by which heavy products like iron can be sent to cities for sale and export.<sup>66</sup> The creation of the Schuylkill Canal was justified by the quantity of "products of the field, forest and mine - all of which abounded in the counties drained by the river and its numerous tributary streams," but needed a way to reaching market.<sup>67</sup> The main line of the Reading Railroad which was laid along the Schuylkill eventually picked up

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<sup>63</sup> The organization of this village was probably very similar to the self-contained nature of iron plantations in the region. The town store described by Binings in his discussion of payment in credit is echoed in Pennypacker's relation that in Phoenixville, "workers were paid with colored pasteboard checks, varying in value from 3 cents to five dollars. These checks were the currency of the neighborhood." Pennypacker, 138. and Arthur Cecil Bining, "The Iron Plantations of Early Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (April 1933).

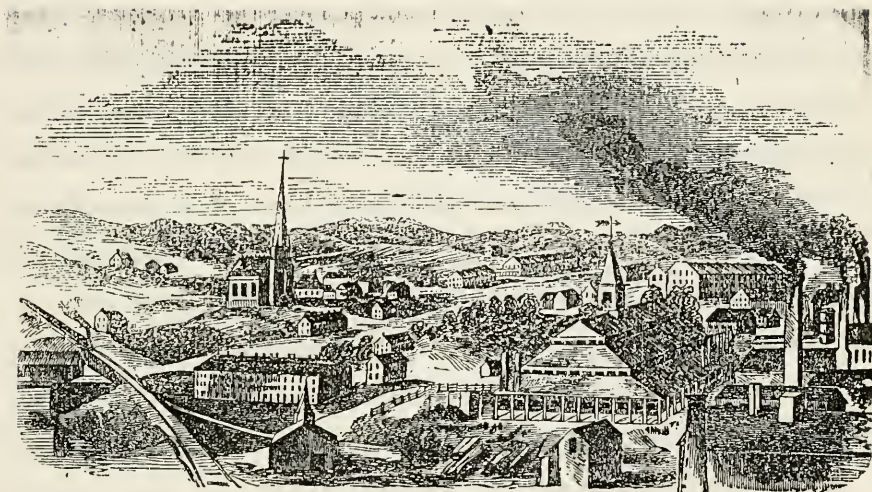
<sup>64</sup> *American Republican*, 6 August 1850.

<sup>65</sup> Bining, 15.

<sup>66</sup> William J. Duane, *Letters Addressed to the People of Pennsylvania Respecting the Internal Improvement of the Commonwealth by Means of Roads and Canals* (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken Printer, 1811), 31.

<sup>67</sup> Eli Bowen, *The Pictorial Sketchbook of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Willis Hazard, 1852), 79.





PHOENIXVILLE IRON WORKS.

Fig. 40 Early scenic view of Phoenixville, prior to 1852.  
Eli Bowen, *The Pictorial Sketch-Book of Pennsylvania or Its Scenery, Improvements, Resources, and Agriculture* (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1852), 66.



much of this traffic. Phoenixville's location on this key transportation artery would shape long term development in a way that was very different from properties on the western side of the corridor, which were bypassed by the transportation infrastructure of turnpikes and later railroads throughout most of this period.

At least one other property advertised a mill seat for processing iron nearby: " a capitol seat for manufactories or any business which requires a powerful command of water. The property consist of 53 acres of land on French Creek...the improvements are: a rolling, slitting mill and forge for making bar iron, with about 13 feet head and fall, and other buildings necessary for the accommodation of the works."<sup>68</sup> This site, and any other iron mills that might have existed in the area, did not develop the organizational hierarchy needed to sustain itself as long-term manufactory and, as a result, the Phoenix Iron Works became the node of industry in the corridor.

The Phoenix Works evolved with the needs of the time, and as it became apparent that nail production no longer garnered the highest profits, the company moved into a new area - railroad iron. In 1846 the iron works negotiated with the Schuylkill Canal and Navigation Company to construct a branch canal running through the site which would make the existing water power more effective.<sup>69</sup> With each new construction project the French and Pickering Creeks became increasingly tamed and manipulated.

With this improved power source in place, a larger rolling mill was installed which could handle the increased specifications for railroad iron. Dependence on this one product, however, proved to be a mistake in the mid-1850's when the railroad bond market collapsed.<sup>70</sup> The iron works, however, survived by developing the wrought iron Griffen canon which was used during the Civil War and later broadened its scope to include iron columns and girders, which had recently emerged as a new construction technology. In addition, a new branch of the company was created to focus on the

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<sup>68</sup> *American Republican*, 15 February 1814.

<sup>69</sup> Pennypacker, 144.

<sup>70</sup> *Daily Local*, 25 November 1854.





manufacture of iron bridge components.<sup>71</sup> The overall scope of the company and the village which it sustained was regional, but it attained national prominence with the introduction of rail transit which enabled the shipment of their products as far west as Louisiana and up into Canada.

The number of employees at the iron works grew rapidly. The size of the population grew from 147 people in 1846 to over 300 people in 1848, which, in turn, necessitated a vast increase in the size of the town. Over 200 buildings were quickly erected to accommodate the work force, and blocks by the name of Nailer's and Puddler's Row brought the urban grid into the former countryside.<sup>72</sup> The town's growth increased exponentially as tradespeople arrived to cater to the work force, and other industrialists set up shop in the area to take further advantage of the local resources. A description from 1840 provides a clear picture of Phoenixville's early situation:

Phoenixville is located at the junction of the French Creek and Schuylkill, commanding the aid of the canal, the water power of both streams. Its prosperity depends principally upon the heavy iron and cotton manufactories...a large population is composed of the workmen who labor in the mills.

Phoenixville has sprung up quite magically...it is not a long time ago, since a few scattered houses contained its sole population, now it is quite a large town. Just stand upon the high bluff upon which part of it is erected, and the neat cottages, the handsome houses, the churches, and stores present a flourishing and imposing prospect.<sup>73</sup>

The 1860 Manufacturing Census for the Borough of Phoenixville indicates the extent to which manufacturing shaped the development of the town. While some industries like the Phoenix Iron Works had converted to steam power by this time, other factories still relied on water power like Geo. W. Richardson's Cotton Manufactory. This factory produced cotton ticking and yarn and employed 63 men and 70 women. Other trades practiced

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<sup>71</sup> Pennypacker, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Pennypacker, 145.

<sup>73</sup> *Village Record*, 28 July 1840.



throughout the corridor were established in Phoenixville, but they generally operated on a larger scale, tending to employ five or more people on a steady basis. Whereas the Pikeland area, to the west, was able to support several individual tailors and shoemakers, Phoenixville sustained a tailor shop which employed five men who could sew over 1,000 pairs of pants per year and a shoemaking factory in which seven men could make over 1,600 pairs of shoes (including cheap work boots and expensive calf skin shoes) annually<sup>74</sup>. The town also hosted a confectioner and a baker who together employed twenty-six people and other specialized industries like a Windsor chair factory and a tinware shop.

By the end of this period, this section of the corridor had obviously forsaken its agricultural roots as embodied by John Starr's first grist mill on the much-altered mouth of the French Creek. Samuel Pennypacker, a resident of the area at that time, optimistically described the rapid suburbanization of this factory town.

Since the close of the war Phoenixville has been making rapid strides in the path of improvement. Streets are beginning to be opened up on all sides, through what was recently country fields. Farms are forgetting their plows and being divided up into town lots and a suburb, consisting of residences built in a superior style and dubbed "Kansas," has sprung into existence on Gay street almost miraculously.<sup>75</sup>

Due to its prime location on the Schuylkill River and its access to the main line of the Reading Railroad, Phoenixville developed a character which was complementary to, and yet highly differentiated from that of the rest of the corridor. Its utilization of the Pickering Valley's natural resources was pursued in a very different fashion from the approach taken by local farmers and small-time millers. For that reason, Phoenixville became the area's eastern gateway to the greater Philadelphia community.

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<sup>74</sup> United States Manufacturing Census 1860, Chester County, Pennsylvania, United States National Archives, Philadelphia Branch.

<sup>75</sup> Pennypacker, 163.



### The Corridor's Landscape as Ordered by the Visitor

Although Phoenixville was the largest settlement in this area, it was not the only town of significance. Both Kimberton in East Pikeland township and Yellow Springs in West Pikeland township served as points of congregation for both local residents and a considerable number of outside visitors. These visitors came to the area for a variety of reasons, bringing with them an appreciation of the landscape that was shaped by values different from those of the residents. Many of them came from the increasingly urban Philadelphia area seeking temporary refuge from the cacophony of the city and a cleansing of their senses.

The village of Kimberton was the brainchild of Emmor Kimber, a Philadelphia bookseller who decided to develop a boarding school for young women during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The foundation of this enterprise was the plantation and tavern property known by the name *The Sign of the Bear*. It was an attractive property for such a venture as can be seen in the sale notice which was printed in August of 1815.<sup>76</sup> The property was located 28 miles from Philadelphia, but was situated only seven miles from the Lancaster Turnpike, offering potential enrollees the benefits of a country location with reasonable access to transportation. The tavern was situated "at the intersection of five public roads" which meant it was also well connected locally. There were already considerable improvements to the property which included, in addition to the tavern, a two story stone house, two tenant houses, a grist mill, a saw mill, a barn, stables, a spring house, and even a lime kiln. The infrastructure was already in place, Kimber simply had to adapt it to his specific needs.

Three years later, the school was advertising for pupils, and the capacity was set at fifty scholars. Enrollment was limited to girls, and though Kimber was a Quaker, it was not restricted to members of the Society of Friends. There were to be special classes in geography, the French language and maps, in addition to the core courses of reading,

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<sup>76</sup> *American Republican*, 8 August 1815.






Fig. 41 Photographs showing two elevations of the Sign of the Bear Tavern in Kimberton, PA, circa 1940.  
Photograph Collection, East Pikeland Township - Streets - Kimberton, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.





VR- 11-29-1864

**Valuable Hotel & Store Stand,**  
IN KIMBERTON, AT PUBLIC SALE.  
ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1864.

 Situated in East Pikeland township, in the village of Kimberton, 5 miles from Phoenixville and 5 from Springville. It is one of the best locations in the county, having a daily mail from Philadelphia. The property contains 5 ACRES, more or less, divided into two enclosures. The land is productive and under post fence. The improvements are large, all renewed in the year 1864 in modern style. MANSION, 65 by 45 feet in width, with kitchen attached on first floor, large Store Room, Bar Room, Hall, Parlor and Dining room, with Kitchen, the second floor is divided into convenient sized bed rooms. The Barn is 45 by 59 feet, divided into stalls to accommodate 20 horses, shed attached for wagon house, Slaughter house, in good order, Pig Pen, Spring House and Tenant house, Ice House, Tailor Shop. The property is a very desirable one being the place where elections, meetings and all the business of the township is transacted. The subscriber is compelled to sell on account of ill-health. Any person wishing to view the property will please call on the subscriber in Wallace township, near Wallace Inn. Terms easy.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY.**  
Also, at the same time, the following Personal Property, consisting of HOUSEHOLD AND KITCHEN FURNITURE—large Gas-Burner Cook Stove, Parlor Stove, Corner Cupboard, large Dining Table, small do., &c. Also, 1 Carriage, 2 seated for one or two horses; silver mounted and a first class Wagon nearly new; 1 top buggy as good as new, Harness, 1 Sleigh, new; large strap forks, rakes, 1 wheelbarrow, hoes, shovels, &c. Sale to commence at 1 o'clock on said day, when conditions will be made known by  
nov29 64 WM. H. KRAEPEL

Fig. 42 Advertisement for the Kimberton Hotel, 1864.  
•Note the local prominence of the site and the improvements to the property which remained well into the late 19th century.  
*Village Record*, 29 November 1864, Newspaper Clipping File, East Pikeland - Lands, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

**BOARDING SCHOOL,**  
FOR  
**GIRLS,**  
AT KIMBERTON, CHESTER COUNTY, PENN.

Instruction is given in reading, writing, arithmetic, book keeping, English, grammar, geography, the use of maps and globes, the delineation of maps, history, chronology, botany, composition, drawing, painting, needlework, and the elements of the French and Latin languages.

Terms \$140 per annum, payable quarterly in advance, for board, tuition and washing. For pens and ink, and for the use of the class-books in reading, no separate charge is made.

Kimberton is situated in a healthful and pleasant part of the country, twenty-eight miles N. W. from Philadelphia, having a regular communication with the city by stage—and also, during the summer season by packet boats on the Schuylkill canal.

For admission, or for references to parents whose children have been educated at the school, apply to  
**EMMOR KIMBER,**  
SUPERINTENDENT.


 In Philadelphia, parents are respectfully referred to Wm. Stevenson, Esq. Chesnut street; Samuel Archer, Mulberry street; Joseph Warner, 171, Market street; or to Robert V. Massey, 245, North Third Street.

Fig. 43 Broadside by Emmor Kimber to promote Kimberton Academy.  
•Note the extensive curriculum and the way in which the location is characterized, healthful and convenient.  
Broadside Collection, Kimberton Academy, Manuscript Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



writing, and grammar.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, classical studies in Greek and Latin were added, as well as a botany course.<sup>78</sup> Local tradition is that the girls helped gather specimens for William Darlington's book *Flora Cestricea*.<sup>79</sup> Tuition was set at the sum of \$200 a year in 1818. Kimber requested that children not be sent against their will and that parents not encourage frequent visits home.

Educating such a large group of children was no small feat, notwithstanding the arrangements that were necessary to shelter and feed them. The school's dormitory was eighty feet across the front and contained twenty rooms, not including cellars. Kimber considered it "altogether as conveniently and as pleasantly situated for the purpose as any place within my knowledge."<sup>80</sup> Food was supplied by Kimber's farmland which surrounded the school and was tended by a tenant farmer. Kimber said that the complex of houses and mills gave the crossroads "the appearance of a village," and that, it was destined to become.<sup>81</sup>

Prior to its acquisition by Kimber, the tavern was the key fixture of the crossroads. It was maintained as such and gained an even larger clientele as parents descended on the school to pay their visits to their children. Kimberton's ties to the Philadelphia area were strengthened when Emmor Kimber put the village on the local stage route. The winter schedule for 1824 included trips to Kimberton once on every fourth and seventh day of the week leaving from the Green Tree on Arch Street at 8:00 AM.<sup>82</sup> The return trip was offered on every second and sixth day, necessitating a minimum two day stay for each visit. In order to assure prospective student's parents that the school was located not in the wilderness, but in a safe, civilized place, he publicized the following:

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<sup>77</sup> *Village Record*, 8 April 1818.

<sup>78</sup> *Village Record*, 11 May 1825.

<sup>79</sup> Kimberton Historic District National Register Nomination, Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation, section 7 page 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Village Record*, 4 August 1818.

<sup>81</sup> *Village Record*, 8 April 1818.

<sup>82</sup> *American Republican*, 28 January 1824.



"The school is situated in a healthful part of the country, 28 miles from Philadelphia, having regular communication with the city three times a week by means of a stage. There is a licensed house of entertainment, a post office, and a physician resident at the place."<sup>83</sup>

The presence of the tavern as well as the post office, mills and a physician would have made this crossroads a point of intensive local and regional activity, though on a much smaller scale than that of Phoenixville. A later sales notice for the house of entertainment, then known as the Kimberton Hotel, illustrates the way in which local activity was centered around this complex. The notice states that the property "is a very desirable one being the place where elections, meeting, and all business of the township is transacted."<sup>84</sup> There, local farmers bringing in grain to be milled would have had the opportunity to mingle with city dwellers in for a short visit and tour of the countryside.

The picturesque scenery, which surrounded the village and was to be found throughout much of the corridor, became increasingly attractive to affluent urbanites during the beginning of the nineteenth century. People brought their children to the French Creek Boarding school at Kimberton, not only for the quality of education offered, but for the salubrious natural atmosphere. This atmosphere was felt to improve both their physical condition, as well as providing a healthy, moral climate. A testimonial from one mother whose daughter attended the school states: "The order and regularity therein, the innocent freedom and playfulness, the general air of contentment and health in the scholars impressed my mind very favorably towards the institution."<sup>85</sup> Another visiting parent claimed, "It seemed as if the rose had here a finer perfume, the soft air as it breathed through the garden, a balmier freshness... from experience I can say this school has been of eminent utility to the county and neighborhood."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Village Record*, 25 May 1825.

<sup>84</sup> *Village Record*, 29 November 1864.

<sup>85</sup> *Village Record*, 8 May 1822.

<sup>86</sup> *Village Record*, 27 June 1832.



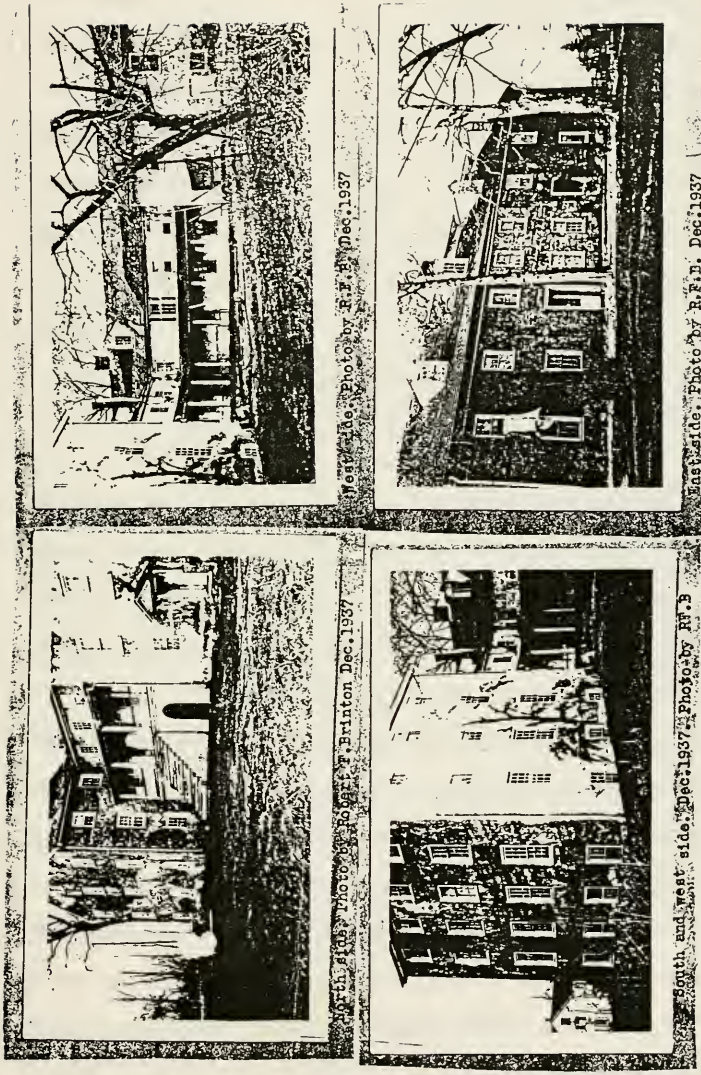


Fig. 44 Photographs taken in 1937 of the Kimberton Academy dormitory complex. Most of this structure was destroyed to make room for a suburban development, however, a portion of the east side remains. Newspaper Clipping File, East Pikeland Township - Kimberton - Private Schools, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.







The natural resources recognized by visitors to the area were rather different from those recognized by year round residents, farmers in the business of cultivating and domesticating the land. Each group appreciated the scenic vistas offered by the rolling topography, but the aspects each appreciated were intrinsically shaped by the configuration of their value systems. Some may have found comfort in the type of landscape embodied in *A Poem on Chiltren Mill* where the land had been carefully molded to fulfill its agrarian potential, and the streams were contained by channels guiding them to waiting wheels. There were others, however, who articulated an appreciation for a different type of landscape as expressed in one visitor's experience in Kimberton:

...the situation is one extremely romantic and beautiful. It looks as if the gayer muses might delight to wander along the verdant banks or the stream or the more sober to climb the hills and repose beneath the lofty trees of the woodland.<sup>87</sup>

One experience is based on physical utility and the other on cerebral contemplation, but in each case this landscape of the Pickering Valley has benefits to confer. No matter what system of order is imposed over it, each person sifts and sorts their experience to create an distinct impression which is carried in memory.

Many memories were certainly carried away from the Yellow Springs complex in West Pikeland township. During the eighteenth century, it held a highly-regarded reputation as a fashionable resort which it maintained into the nineteenth century. The healthful conditions in the area led to its conversion into an army hospital under the administration of Dr. Bodo Otto during the Valley Forge encampment. A tavern petition was filed for a house of entertainment there in 1722, and it became the region's best known spa during the latter half of the eighteenth century. A sale notice printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1763 provides an image of the complex as it existed at that time, already renown for the quality of its mineral waters which spouted from the sulphur and

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<sup>87</sup> *Village Record*, 2 September 1818.



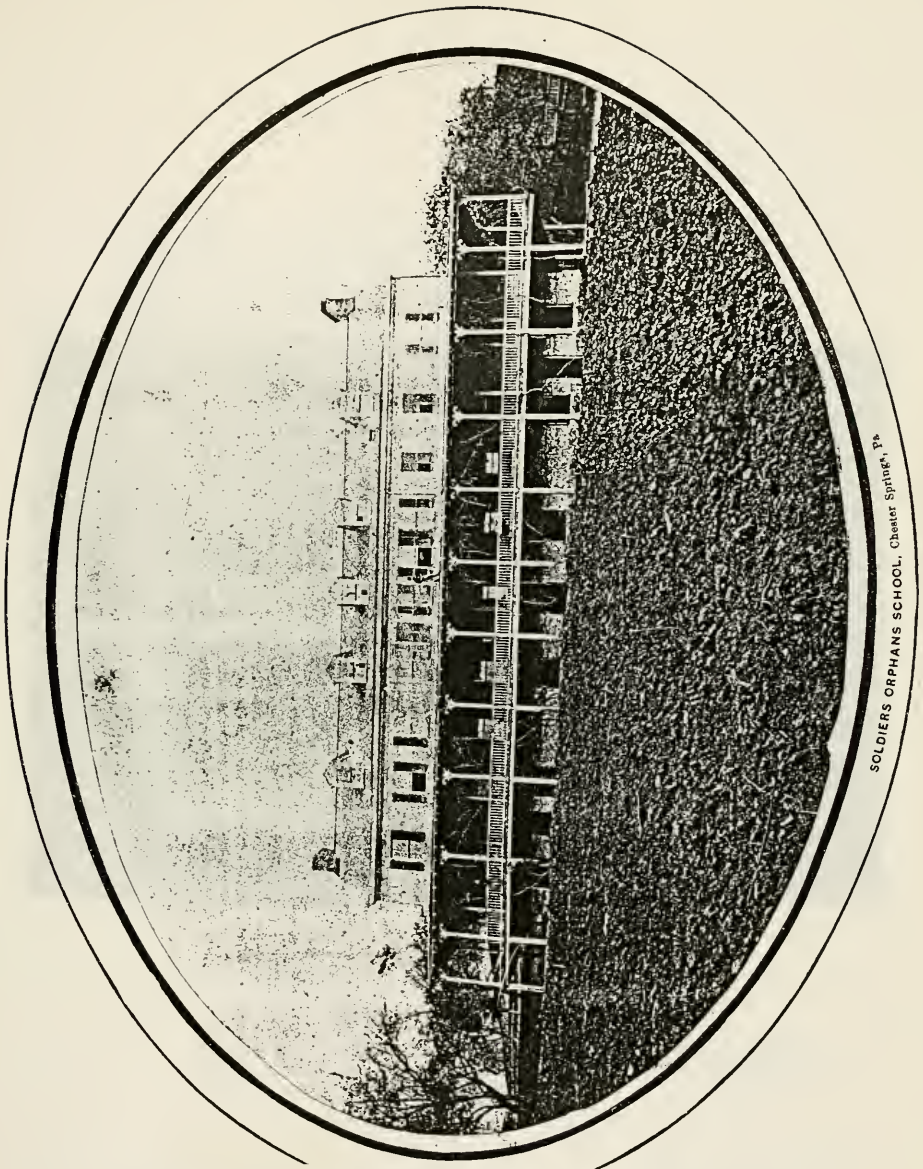


Fig. 45    Undated photograph of the Washington Building of the Soldiers Orphans School which was constructed for use as a hospital during the Valley Forge encampment.

- The building caught fire and was destroyed many decades ago, but recent volunteer efforts have managed to stabilize the ruined foundations which have been commemorated as a Revolutionary War monument.

Photograph Collection, West Pikeland Township - Schools - Soldiers Orphans, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



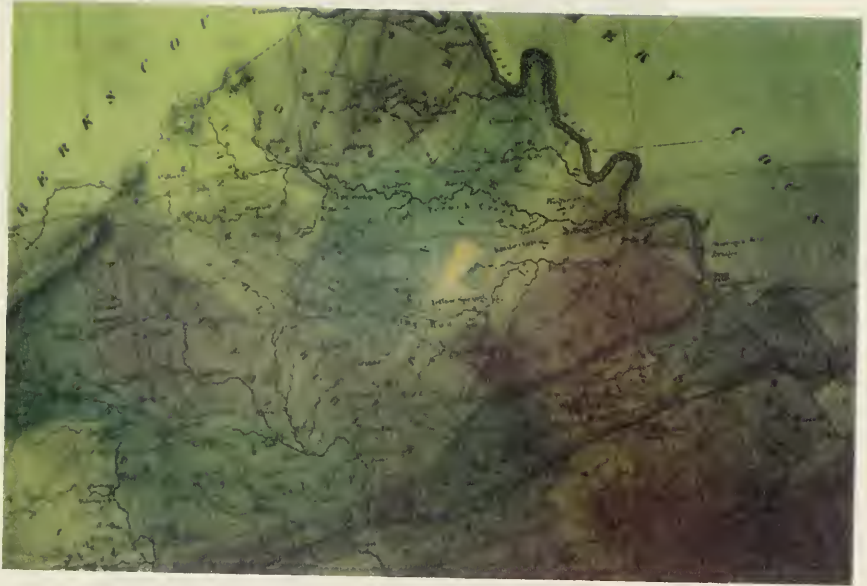


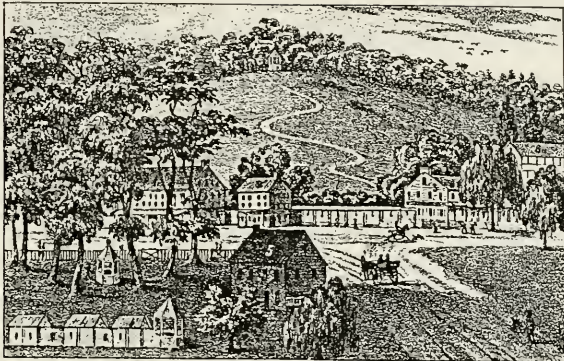
Fig. 46 Map of Chester County by J.S. Hindman, 1830.  
•Note the major intersection of roads in the vicinity of the Yellow Springs Resort.  
The Map Collection, Chester County, PA, Manuscript Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.





June 2 (-1848)

HARROLD E GILLINGHAM  
COLLECTION



By order of J. M. Lingen, Esq. 116, Chestnut St. Philad.

1 Hotel  
 2 Park  
 3 Casino  
 4 Bath and  
 5 Pharmacy

6 One Room  
 7 Barren  
 8 Hospital  
 9 Women's Spring  
 10 Female Socy  
 11 Church

**YELLOW SPRINGS, OR CHESTER SPRINGS,**  
**CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, 32 MILES FROM PHILA.**

This Watering Place will be ready to receive visitors after the Fifteenth of May, Inst The Proprietor having added a spacious dining room, and otherwise enlarged and improved his Establishment, has also engaged an experienced gentleman as Superintendent, and secured the services of the best cooks, Confectioners and Servants, by which efforts he hopes to render his Establishment both agreeable and stylish.

This place, so long celebrated for its Chalybeate Baths, unrivalled in the cure of Chronic Disease, was selected by General Washington as an Army Station, for its healthfulness and beauty, and teems with historical recollections. It is Dr. Lingen's invention, after the first of September to appropriate part of the Establishment (which will be open during the whole year) to patients under Homoeopathic or Hydropathic treatment, the variety of waters being eminently adapted to the latter purpose. Besides being a Post Office station, there are facilities for arrival and departure twice a day by the Reading, Columbia and Norristown Rail Roads. Letters to the Proprietor (post paid) are to be addressed to

**DR. GEORGE LINGEN,**  
*Chester Springs, Chester Co., Pa.*

Fig. 47 Broadside advertising the Yellow Springs Resort, 1848.  
 •Note the emphasis is placed first on luxury, then on health, and lastly on convenience.  
 Broadside Collection - Yellow Springs Resort, Manuscript Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.





iron springs.<sup>88</sup> The mineral baths were located on a 150 acre property of which half was cleared and the other half timbered. According to the notice, it sat at the convergence of "two great roads," one of which connected the site to the city of Philadelphia. During the summer season the site was inundated with visitors, many of whom were known to "take lodgings for weeks together."<sup>89</sup> At the height of the season one hundred to five hundred people a day congregated there seeking cures for their physical and spiritual ailments.

The primary attraction were the baths which are described as follows:

There is a frame house enclosing the said spring round the inside, and a pond in the middle about 7 or 8 feet square and 3 feet deep for the conveniency of bathing, which can be emptied or filled in a very little time by opening or shutting a sluice.<sup>90</sup>

The rather primitive quality of the first baths was eventually superseded by fancier trappings. In 1839, the spa was noted for having a "bathing establishment" that measured 85 feet by 30 feet and was surrounded by an architecturally designed portico.<sup>91</sup> By 1856, the complex had expanded to include a variety of accommodations, from the large hotel buildings of the main house, to the smaller, private cottages, many of which were connected by covered promenades. The bathing facilities had also been updated. Showers, douche baths of various types (plunge, rising, and falling), and Russian steam facilities had all been installed.<sup>92</sup> Other leisure accouterments were available for those taking a break from the hydropathic therapies. Among these were: groves with paths, swings, a billiard saloon, a ten-pin alley, an ice-cream saloon, and for the evening's

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<sup>88</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 13 January, 1763.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 13 January, 1763.

<sup>91</sup> *The World*, 31 July 1839.

<sup>92</sup> A detailed discussion of the use of cold baths is found in a pamphlet by Dr. Rush. The use of these baths was promoted in the belief that they: washed impurities from the skin, braced muscle fiber to better its tone, stimulated the nervous system, and prevented warm weather diseases. He also felt it had "agreeable effects on female beauty." The recommended time for a cold bath was in the morning before breakfast, prior to which a short walk should be taken in preparation. Soaking time was only one to three minutes, and to receive the full benefit the person should be vigorously rubbed down with a "flesh cloth" by a servant for fifteen minutes afterward.

Dr. Benjamin Rush, *Directions for the Use of the Mineral Water and Cold Bath at Harrogate Near Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Melchior Steiner Printer, 1786), B.



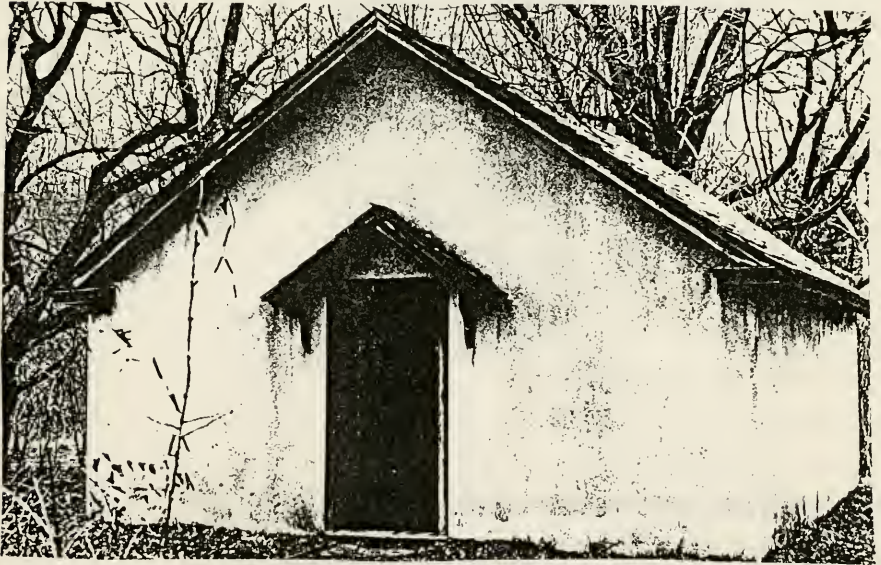
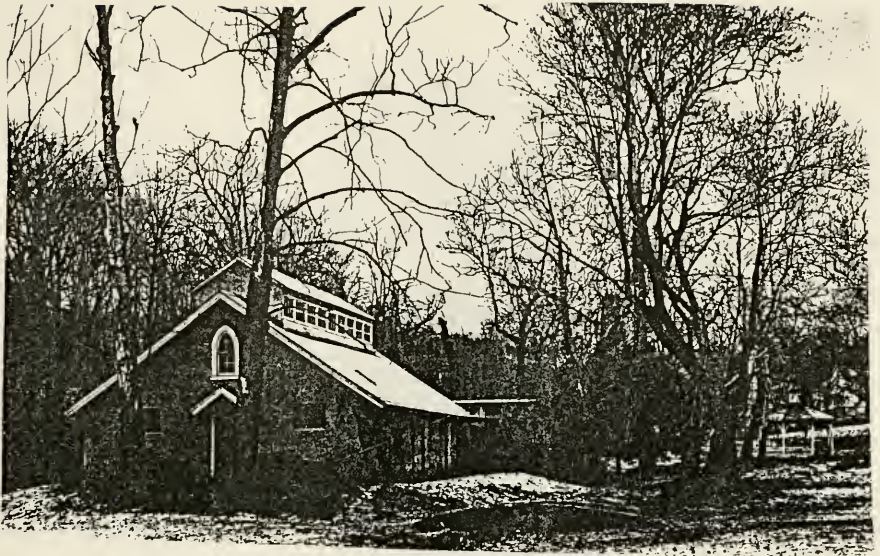


Fig. 48 Diamond spring house and pool house at Yellow Springs, PA.  
National Register Property File, Yellow Springs Historic District, Chester County Department  
of Parks and Recreation, West Chester, PA.



### THE SIAMESE TWINS

Arrived here on Sunday, and intend remaining until Thursday morning. From here they go to Downingtown, from there to the Yellow Springs, and from thence to Phoenixville. They are interesting, intelligent, and well worth seeing. The people of Chester county generally will not lose so favorable an opportunity of seeing them.



### Siamese Twins

FOR THREE DAYS ONLY

CHANG ENG, the Siamese Twin Brothers, very respectfully acquaint the Ladies and Gentlemen of West Chester, that they are now in the borough, and will remain a day and a night, Tuesday and Wednesday, and will receive visitors on those days at Mr. Holmes's CHESTER COUNTY HOTEL. The hours of admission, to their room will be from 10 to 12 at noon, and from 7 to 9 in the evening.

Admittance 25 Cents.

Pamphlets containing an account of the Twins with a portrait, can be purchased at their room. Dec 27

The Twins have also made arrangements to visit the undermentioned places and to receive visitors at the same specified, viz.

At Downingtown, West's Tavern, on Thursday and Friday 29th & 30th. Hours from 10 to 12 at noon, and 7 to 9 in the evening.

At the Yellow Springs, on Saturday the 31st of December. Hours from 2 to 4 in the afternoon, and from 7 to 9 in the evening.

At Phoenixville, Mr. Casner's Hotel, on Monday and Tuesday, the 21st and 22nd Jan'y 1837. Hours from 2 to 4 in the afternoon and from 7 to 9 in the evening.

Fig. 49 Advertisement for an appearance of the celebrated Siamese twins Chang and Eng at Yellow Springs in 1836. *American Republican*, 27 December 1836, Newspaper Clipping File, West Pikeland Township - Yellow Springs, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.





entertainment a bar and ballroom.<sup>93</sup> Under Mrs. Holman's ownership, a "first rate band" was in residence throughout the summer for "the entertainment of guests during the season."<sup>94</sup> The hotel also had its own regular mail service and newspaper delivery by which *The Ledger* reached the Springs by early afternoon without delay.<sup>95</sup>

A sale notice for the property in 1856 drops a hint of what pressures were involved in maintaining a luxury resort in an out of the way place during the summer. That notice mentions the presence of "a large dome for making ice, a cave, and three ice houses sufficiently large to contain a supply of ice during the business season."<sup>96</sup> This lets slip a little hint of the infrastructure and quality of management that had to be in place to make this resort successful. The daily operations on the site must have been staggering at the height of the season. There were several hundred rooms to furnish and clean; stable facilities which held from eighty to one hundred horses, each of which needed care; food and drink to be brought in from the kitchen garden and wine cellar and then be prepared; and there were critical matters of hygiene to be addressed, especially at a resort where the quality of the water was the main attraction.

A seasonal hamlet grew up around the Springs. It was served by a store, a blacksmith shop, a saw mill, and later even a barbershop. It never developed as a true town in the way that Phoenixville did, because the dynamics of tourism are very different from manufacturing. Yellow Springs was fated to remain a seasonal town well into the nineteenth century. There were attempts to capitalize on the resource in 1814, when a developer purchased the property with the intention of redefining it as the town of Bath. The acreage surrounding the complex was divided into town lots, and a lottery scheme was devised. Each purchaser would pay \$250 for a parcel of land and bathing privileges, however, the actual location of the parcel would be determined by lottery.<sup>97</sup> The plan

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<sup>93</sup> *American Republican*, 1 January 1856.

<sup>94</sup> *The World*, 31 July 1839.

<sup>95</sup> *Daily Local*, 18 August 1855.

<sup>96</sup> *American Republican*, 1 January 1856.

<sup>97</sup> *American Republican*, 15 March 1814.





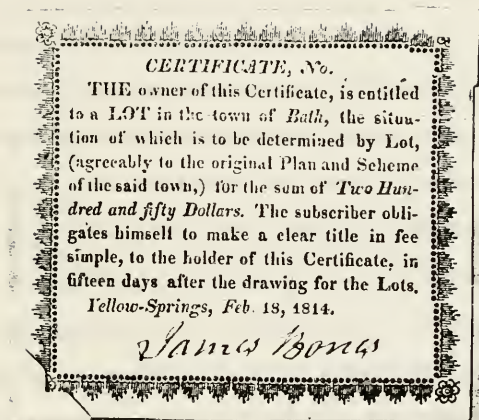


Fig. 50 Ticket from the 1814 lottery which was staged as a development ploy for the Yellow Springs area.  
Ephemera Collection, West Pikeland Township History - Vault, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



never materialized, however, and most of the property was reconsolidated under later owners.

The concept of a country seat in the vicinity of the springs continued to be promoted by several local property owners who must have felt it was a venture which could be marketed to the elite families of Philadelphia. A sixty acre farm was lauded as having soil whose "fertility is equaled by few in the county." Not wanting to limit the pool of prospective buyers, the owners dropped the hint that, " it might be well worth the attention of any gentleman in the city, desirous of a handsome country seat."<sup>98</sup> But why would any gentleman settle for a farm when he could have his own version of the Springs? Another notice claims that their property has "several springs, one of them exceedingly fine with a house over it, and one of mineral water similar to that of the Yellow Springs plunging bath."<sup>99</sup> And for those interested in capitalizing on the Springs' existing clientele, a lot in the "town of Bath" only a few rods from the springs, with a newly erected and commodious house was available in 1818 for development as "a boarding house, or the country residence of any person desiring to spend the summer at this watering place, or it would be an excellent stand for a store."<sup>100</sup> Real estate in this area had become a valuable commodity. Not only were the streams sustaining agriculture and manufacturing, they also harbored a few secluded retreats to which visitors chose to escape while recuperating and socializing. Water, minerals, and timber were used by all, but in differing degrees and to different ends.

Guests arrived at the Springs in one of two ways, either with their own entourage or by stage wagon. Stages ran between the springs and two railroad stations, the Phoenixville stop on the Reading Railroad line to the east and the Steamboat Station stop on the Columbia Railroad line to the south. The trip from Philadelphia took a mere three

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<sup>98</sup> *Village Record*, 1 December 1819.

<sup>99</sup> *American Republican*, 15 August 1826.

<sup>100</sup> *Village Record*, 16 September 1818.



hours, and from Baltimore it took eight.<sup>101</sup> An advertised notice from 1831 does offer information that the development of a railroad line between Yellow Springs and the Pennsylvania Railroad was contemplated early in the nineteenth century, but did not actually materialize until forty years later, after the resort had already gone out of business.<sup>102</sup>

For many years, visitors came to partake of Yellow Springs' offerings: curative treatments, picturesque scenery a healthy atmosphere, and entertainment. Dr. Benjamin Rush presented a thorough analysis of the use of mineral waters in treating disease in his paper *Directions for the Use of the Mineral Water and Cold Bath at Harrogate Near Philadelphia* which was printed in 1786. The pamphlet lists fifteen separate conditions in which mineral water treatments were believed to be effective. They included all categories from hysteria to worms.<sup>103</sup> The next section of the paper is devoted to the discussion of treatment by ingestion of the water, which was employed in addition to the previously mentioned bathing practices. Rush recommended that the amount of mineral water a person should imbibe should be "determined by the constitution and the disease of the patient." From his tone, it appears that the water generally tasted quite bad, and it was recommended that the patient build up a tolerance to it by drinking a little at a time, on an empty stomach, and mixed with a bit of cinnamon or mint water if needed. It was also recommended that "the patient always walk or ride, or use some gentle exercise immediately after drinking it."

In addition to the mineral water, the resort also offered a lovely setting in which there were a number of opportunities for the latter task. As was previously mentioned, there were groves with swings and gravel paths on which to walk, where one could both observe and be a part of the social milieu. One visitor remarked in 1855 that the roads in the area were of good quality and "morning and evening visitors in their carriages and on

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<sup>101</sup> *American Republican*, 1 January 1856.

<sup>102</sup> *Village Record*, 16 February 1831.

<sup>103</sup> Rush, A2.



horseback may be seen viewing the noble scenery which commands the admiration of all who have an eye for the picturesque and beautiful."<sup>104</sup> Another benefit offered by its country location was the quality of the air. Summers in the city could be quite taxing with the ever-present threat of fevers and disease, and trips to the countryside offered a respite for those who could afford to travel. One traveler described Yellow Springs as set "amidst scenery nowhere surpassed in variety or beauty, and surrounded by hills, and mountains affording the most pure and healthful breezes in the warmest summer weather."<sup>105</sup>

Another account stated "We cannot imagine how citizens of a pent up city can abide to inhale the foetid atmosphere during a hot and sultry summer, when health and freshness may be obtained by a short rural sojourn at such a delightful spot (Yellow Springs)."<sup>106</sup>

A short sojourn could be made, due to the Yellow Springs' relative proximity to the city of Philadelphia, though it attracted visitors from a much larger region. A poem printed in the *Village Record* prompts locals to head out to the "the yellows" as it was called by some. "Brown industry cease from thy toiling, pale study abandon thy cell, Poor and Wealthy leave off your turmoiling, and go to the mineral well. About twenty-five miles from the city, and four or five miles from the ship, in a spot rather wilder than pretty (From the city 'tis but a short trip)..."<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately, the fact that a short rural sojourn could be made rather conveniently, contributed to the eventual downfall of the resort. As transportation improved with the advent of the railroad system, people wanted to travel farther afield to new and seemingly more exotic locations.

There was local competition in the mineral spa business even during the late eighteenth century, but by the mid-nineteenth century, the pressure imposed by regional competition proved to be overwhelming. According to Bowen, "this watering place formerly enjoyed a high celebrity and is still visited to some extent; but numerous similar

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<sup>104</sup> *Daily Local*, 18 August 1855.

<sup>105</sup> *American Republican*, 18 July 1824.

<sup>106</sup> *Daily Local*, 30 June 1855.

<sup>107</sup> *Village Record*, 28 August 1822.





establishments, springing up in every part of the country have no doubt materially diminished its ancient attractions."<sup>108</sup>

Visitors to Yellow Springs continued to be satisfied with the quality of the resort, the food, and the baths. Joseph Pleasants of Philadelphia wrote his wife in 1853 telling her of his time there, "I am two hours from home - a most excellent dinner, good attendance, and a bath unequaled in the whole world-expense of travelling one dollar, and good company to greet me."<sup>109</sup> Often times visitors tried to convince others that its proximity was a benefit, not a deterrent. Pleasants continues, "...however, no man is a prophet in his own country, and upon the same principle I suppose "the yellows" too convenient to the city to be appreciated by Philadelphians."<sup>110</sup> A notice from 1821 shows that Bedford and Saratoga Springs had already attained greater notoriety by that time, "As the season is at hand when the pent up inhabitants of the cities, and the sedentary citizens of the country towns are in the habit of recreating themselves at watering places, for a few weeks or days at the case may be or the purse holds out, we would recommend public attention to Chaylbeate Springs of Chester County...we are persuaded that the season could not be passed more pleasantly or beneficially at Bedford or Saratoga."<sup>111</sup>

Such commendations did little to sway public opinion, however, and the resort continued its decline. In 1855 it was offered up for auction, but "remained unsold for want of a single bidder."<sup>112</sup> In an auction sale the following year, not a single bidder offered the minimum price (\$50,000) needed to pay off the liens on the property. The natural resources of the springs and the countryside became old hat. They lost their outside audience, and with it, the seasonal dynamism surrounding the Springs. The complex would eventually be purchased and used as an orphanage, changing the

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<sup>108</sup> Bowen, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Pleasants, Letter, 18 August 1853, Joseph Pleasants Papers, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>110</sup> Joseph Pleasants, Letter, 18 August 1853, Joseph Pleasants Papers, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>111</sup> *Chester County Democrat*, 21 June 1821.

<sup>112</sup> *American Republican*, 13 November 1855.



✓ R 7-22-1865  
**Sheriff's Sale of Real Estate.**  
**A Valuable and Elegant Site for**  
**County Seats; or for a Boarding**  
**School or Seminary—that celebrated**  
**Watering Place known as the**  
**Chester of Yellow Springs.**

Chester Co., Pennsylvania—Five DWELLING HOUSES, over Thirty Seven Acres of LAND—with extensive Out Buildings, Baths, &c.

BY virtue of a writ of Venditioni Exponas to me directed, will be sold at public sale, on

Thursday, August 10, 1865,

Between the hours of one and two o'clock, P. M. on the premises, all the estate, right, title, interest, claim and demands whatsoever of Augustus C. Snyder and Saranne K. Snyder, his wife, et al. and to all those certain MORTGAGES, Tenements, Public Inc. Buildings, and Tract or Piece of Land, known as the Chester of Yellow Springs property, situate in the Township of West Pikeland, in the county of Chester, bounded by lands of Isaac Austin, Margaret Holman, deceased, (now Wm. W. Holman), William Pennacker, and others, containing THREE SEVEN ACRES and sixty four Perches, (27A 64P.) be the same more or less, with the appurtenances. The improvements are

No. 1. A HOTEL—A three story building, about 85 feet in front, with a porch extending along its sides and front; on the first floor are a parlor, large ball room, 3 large dining rooms, store room, bar room with the fixtures and water introduced under the counter; also a wide and storage cellar, a kitchen with all the necessary water fixtures therein, and a bake house. The second and third stories are divided into pleasant chambers for boarders.

No. 2. "HALL"—A three story Stone House, about 40 feet in front, with a large private dining room on first floor, and the second and third stories divided into chambers.

No. 3. COTTAGE—A two story Stone Building, about 35 feet in front, with two ends or wings extending back; on the first floor are a large drawing room, three bath rooms, with the fixtures for shower, plunge, and rising and falling douche baths, used for hydropathic purposes; two water closets and utility rooms; the second story divided into chambers; there are two cellars under this building, and a porch extending along two sides and front; it is also connected with the Hotel and Hall by a covered promenade of about 125 feet in length.

No. 4. "WASHINGTON HOUSE"—A two-story Frame Building, clap-boarded on the outside, about 30 feet in front, with basement story, in which is a plunge bath and water closet; upon the first floor is a large parlor and water closet; the residue of the house being divided into chambers. There is also a porch extending along the front and ends of the house.

No. 5. Is "OUR HOUSE," a two story Stone Building, about 35 feet in front, with stoops at the door of entrance; a basement story, in which is a pastry room, larder room and storage cellar. It is also attached to it a Barber Shop, and Ice Cream Saloon.

No. 6. "A NEW STONE BARN"

With hay loft and stalls sufficient for the accommodation of a number of horses, with a hydrant and water trough at the door, and a carriage house and wagon house attached.

The water which supplies the Hotel, Cottages, Bath House and Stable, is conveyed from two springs by iron pipes into a reservoir, situated at an elevation sufficient to carry a stream of water over said buildings, and which is conducted through iron, and diseminated through leaden pipes.

The lots are No. 1. Bath House about 75 feet long containing plunge, 4 warm, 1 Russian Steam, rising and falling douche, and several shower baths; dressing rooms and boiler and furnace for heating water. No. 2. Bath House with plunge bath; water supplied to Bath Houses No. 1 and 2 from the Iron and Yellow Springs. No. 3. Bath House containing plunge, shower, rising and falling baths and dressing rooms; water supplied by the celebrated Diamond Spring. Bath Houses No. 1 and 2, and the Iron or Yellow and sulphur Springs are in a grove of fine large trees, laid out in walks, containing Summer Houses and Swings, and is situated in front of the main of hotel building.

There are also on the premises, a FRAME BILLIARD SALOON AND TEN PIN ALLEY, a two-story Wash House, a Frame Cow Shed sufficiently large to accommodate about fifteen Cows; a Stone Spring House with Smoke House in the upper story; three Ice Houses, sufficiently large to contain an ample of ice during the business season; a large dam for making ice; Cave Vault; large Apple Orchard with a variety of other fruit trees; Kitchen Garden with Hot Beds, and a Flower Garden. The land is divided into convenient fields by good fences. There is a

HYDROPATHIC ESTABLISHMENT.

Fitted up a few years since by Dr. Lingen in a superior manner, at great expense, and with every convenience.

The Chester or Yellow Springs is one of the oldest and most successful water places in the country—remarkable for the salubrity of the air, and excellent and variety of the waters. General Washington, during the War of the Revolution, appreciating these advantages, established here a Military Hospital for his Invalid Soldiers. Accessible by two Railroads and Stage Routes—by the Reading Railroad to Ploverville, and the Pennsylvania Central Railroad to the Steamboat Station, thence by Steves—time from Philadelphia about three hours, from Baltimore eight hours. In addition to its value as a Station Place, it is susceptible of being divided into five Country Seats, either with bath for each or several common use of the principal bath or it would suit for an extensive Boarding School or Seminary. The Land is said to contain a large amount of Iron Ore. The Legislature passed an Act of Incorporation some years since whereby the Yellow Springs may be made a Stock Company.

Seized and taken in execution and to be sold as the property of Augustus C. Snyder and Sarannah K. Snyder, his wife.

REES WELSH, Sh'ff.

N. B.—\$500 OF THE PURCHASE MONEY must be paid in PAID FUNDS at the time of sale. The balance must be paid at the same time, or security given for the payment of the balance, with interest on or before the second Monday in August, 1865.

Sheriff's Office, West Chester.

July 20, 1865.

GEO. FRISCOLN, Auc.

Fig. 51 Sheriff's sale notice for the Yellow Springs Hotel, 1865. Note the extent of the resort's holdings - six substantial structures and a variety of secondary accoutrements including baths, gardens, and even a ten-pin bowling alley. *Village Record*, 22 July 1865, Newspaper Clippings Files, West Pikeland Township Lands, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



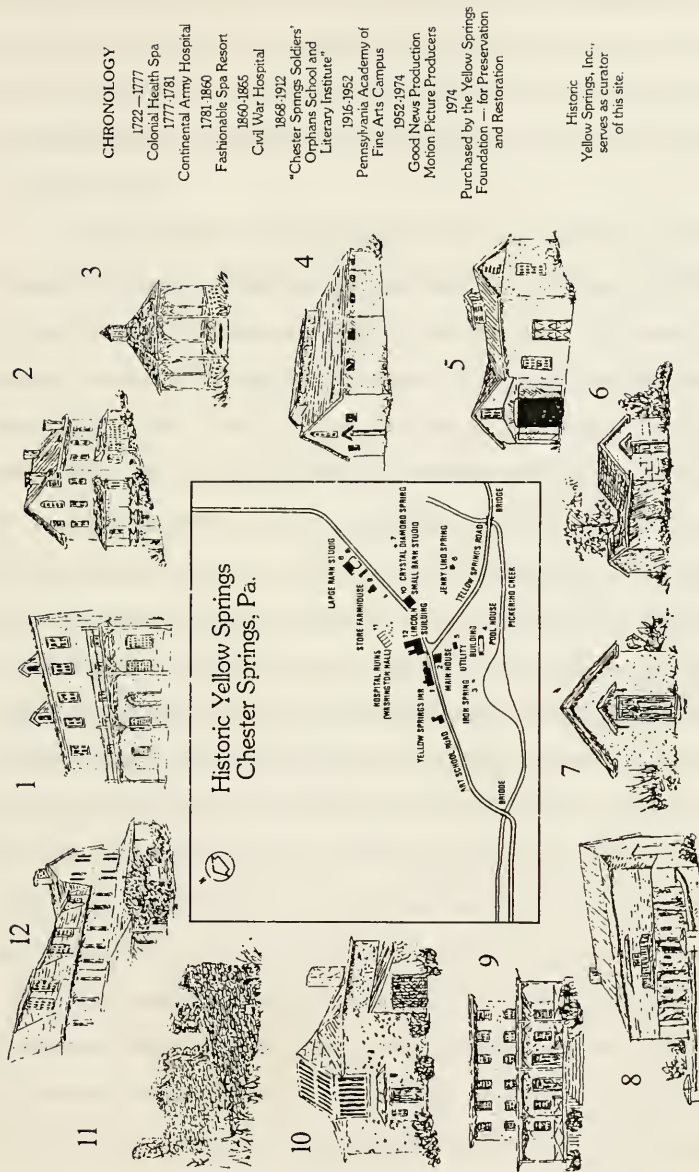


Fig. 52

Current map of the resort, now administered by Historic Yellow Springs.  
 •Some of the structures are publicly owned. Others now house art studios (a practice continued since the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art took over the site during the 1920's), and a few structures are used as private residences.  
 Map of Historic Yellow Springs, Chester Springs, PA, printed by Historic Yellow Springs, Inc., P.O. Box 627, Art School Road, Chester Springs, PA, 19425, n.d.

**CHRONOLOGY**

- 1772—1777 Colonial Health Spa
- 1777-1781 Continental Army Hospital
- 1781-1860 Fashionable Spa Resort
- 1860-1865 Civil War Hospital
- 1868-1912 "Chester Springs Soldiers' Orphans School and Literary Institute"
- 1916-1952 Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Campus
- 1952-1974 Good News Production Motion Picture Producers
- 1974 Purchased by the Yellow Springs Foundation — for Preservation and Restoration

Historic Yellow Springs, Inc., serves as curator of this site.



character of the town but insuring the preservation of many of the 1830's structures in the resort. The impact of the resort would continue to linger on the landscape, however, even as the groves were taken over by shrubs. The streams remain, along with the roads criss-crossing the town. Though the character is visibly altered from its heyday in the 1830's, the qualities that drew people here, clean air, bubbling water, and cool shade can still be appreciated today.

Colonial settlers in the Pickering Valley corridor maintained a complex relationship with the surrounding landscape. Their lives, patterns of settlement, and daily routine were ordered by natural resources in the area, and they in turn transformed these materials in a way which best suited their needs. Even though the area remains predominantly rural in character, humanity's imprint upon the land is strong. It does not necessarily reveal itself in the guise of car dealerships and fast food stands. Instead, it is the remaining woodlots, fields, and stone farmhouses which subtly point to man's transformative powers. This area was shaped by human interests working from within and without. Local residents imposed their own order over the land in the form of farm complexes, woodlots, fields, orchards, gardens, fences, and roads, which allowed them to make their way to market and to the mills. The miller and other early industrialists and craftsmen shaped the land by gaining control over the streams, which enabled them to meet local farmers' needs more readily and by reshaping nature's raw materials like iron and timber into tools for settlement. Forces working from the outside included residents of the greater Philadelphia area, who saw the valley as a convenient retreat from the toil and disease of the city, and as a place for physical as well as mental restoration.

This chapter has sought to examine the way in which different settlers with varied value systems chose to utilize the water, mineral, and timber resources of this area. The farmers capitalized on the well-watered soil, the millers on the rushing streams, and the tourists on the clean air and mineral baths. Each new use brought alterations to the existing cultural landscape through the imposition of a newly configured order. When





viewing the landscape of this valley, it is important to recognize that what exists today is the cumulative impact of 200 years worth of settlement on both the natural and the built environment: the domestication of land and its reclamation by nature, the taming of streams and their regained freedom after the invention of steam power, the cutting of timber and its replacement by second and third generation growth trees. With each ebb and flow of progress, traces of the past are left behind: abandoned mill races, stone outbuildings, ponds of water filling old iron mines, and forgotten market paths.

Progress, however, makes new and sometimes unexpected contributions to the landscape. It is important to realize that progress and improvement were critical themes during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The industrial revolution was already well underway, and the driving impetus for many people was to shape the land, harness its resources, and utilize them for the benefit of mankind. The introduction of technology was critical to the success of these endeavors. Mechanization meant power and control, and one of its most successful applications is seen in the invention and utilization of the railroad. The railroad quickly reshaped this country's conception of speed and distance and fostered a new type of relationship with the land and its resources. The following chapter will explore the way in which the introduction of the Pickering Valley spur line shaped the development of this corridor.



## Chapter 4

### The Pickering Valley Railroad: A New Instrument of Change

The pace of life for Pickering Valley residents began to speed up during the years following the Civil War. In 1869, a group of prominent and well-funded citizens proposed the idea of constructing a spur rail line, which would run through the valley and provide a route whereby local materials could reach Philadelphia and other markets quickly and cheaply. A spur line had the potential to free many local residents of the burden of dealing with poor roads, which were often made impassable by mud and snow. Dairy farmers and teamsters would no longer be forced to negotiate the passage of their cargoes of milk and iron ore to Phoenixville, and if the promoters' expectations were realized, local property values would rise significantly.

By the 1870's, numerous regional rail lines were threaded across southeastern Pennsylvania. While these smaller lines never garnered the acclaim of the more prominent cross-country lines, they did play a crucial role in the development of rural America. They had a tremendous physical impact on the landscape as is seen in George Inness's painting *The Lackawanna Valley*, completed in 1855. The scene shows a steam engine departing from a terminal station as is indicated by the roundhouse in the background. The foreground consists of a meadow, however, the large number of ragged stumps indicates that it had recently been a wooded grove. The environmental impact on the surrounding landscape is obvious, mechanization has overcome nature. Inness provides subtle details in the background, which indicate that there is also a notable change in the development of the town. The station and its support structures like the depot and sidings have sprung up at a slight distance from the core of the town, which is characterized by a prominent steeple and houses clustered around the church. A dichotomy is set up between the old and new. The railroad has established itself as a strong presence in the town. There is a factory to the left of the roundhouse with a tall





Fig. 53 George Inness, *The Lackawanna Valley*, 1855.  
*The Paintings of George Inness: The University of Texas 1965-66* (Austin, TX: The University Art Museum of the University of Texas, 1965), 7.





smoke stack, that rivals the steeple for prominence. It asserts the power of industry, which was ushered in along with the rails, ties, and rolling stock. Eventually, the two distinct zones will merge, and in the process, will forge a new character for the town and with it a new destiny.

This pattern of development was played out many times during the nineteenth century, in small towns and in large cities. With time, the citizens of the Pickering Valley received their wish, the long-awaited 11.3 mile long spur line called the Pickering Valley Railroad. For several decades it was a hub of activity. Six daily trains, three in each direction, gave life in neighboring villages a steady rhythm. The morning milk train and the afternoon mail delivery were constants in the lives of residents, marking the ebb and flow of the weeks and seasons. Eventually, the fervor for the line faded along with its usefulness, and the route was left to be reclaimed by brambles and thickets. Artifacts of the railroad days still remain embedded in the villages and fields which flanked the rails. The line helped shape the form of these towns during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the effects can still be seen today. This chapter will focus on the history of the Pickering Valley Railroad, its importance to local industry, its impact on the built environment within the villages, and its role in the psyche of the community.

#### Financing the Railroad

Collecting the funds necessary to launch such a construction project was a formidable task. Few local residents had money available to invest, as most of their assets were tied up in land. In addition, it was known that spur lines were often unprofitable for large railroad companies. Gentlemen, such as Elias and John Oberholtzer of Cambria and Charles Dean of Chester Springs who spearheaded the campaign for the line, felt that the railroad could indeed be funded if the community worked together, offered their combined financial support, and somehow gained the backing of the Reading Railroad Company. Developing a line was not simply a luxury, it was a necessity. In a public speech, John Oberholtzer vented his frustration with the status quo stating, "Our rich





farms, productive mines, and numerous water powers have cried in vain for railroad communication with some great central place of business."<sup>1</sup> He felt that the community was being shortchanged, and that the introduction of a rail line would remedy their disadvantaged status. With a rail line, their land would be competitive with acreage on other lines which sold for \$50 more an acre; they could send their milk to market directly instead of churning their cream into butter and thereby make a greater profit; they would earn twice as much for their iron ore once transportation costs were reduced and trains replaced teams of horses; and the community would become increasingly attractive to new business enterprises.<sup>2</sup>

The early years of the 1860's brought promising prospects. The Phoenix Iron Company was interested in being a major backer for the project, but the deal fell through for unspecified reasons though they were probably related to conflicts over proposed routes. Although their hopes had been dashed, Oberholtzer and Dean continued to rally the community in pursuit of this common goal. An estimated \$300,000 was needed to accomplish the task, and though they tried to squeeze the money from the community, there simply wasn't enough capital available.<sup>3</sup> They once again approached Phoenix Iron Company, which already had plans to run a line from Phoenixville to Lancaster via Pughtown. Phoenix Iron proposed that the Pickering Valley road could be a branch of their line with a junction at Kimberton, but this outraged the Pickering delegation: "Gentlemen we could not see it!! We could not see the utility of a road that made two junctions to get to Philadelphia. It would not develop our country. It would not accommodate our people. It would not enhance the value of our property."<sup>4</sup> The issue

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<sup>1</sup> Speech, "Address to the People on the Construction of a Railroad," n.d. Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>2</sup> Speech, "Address to the People on the Construction of a Railroad," n.d. Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>3</sup> Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>4</sup> Speech, "Address to the People on the Construction of a Railroad," n.d. Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



then became not simply one of economic development, but of community pride. They did not intend to have their own ambitions undermined by the mighty iron company.

After that incident, Oberholtzer and Dean met with the community once again. There were a significant number of citizens who remained interested in the construction of a line which would connect the Reading line at Phoenixville with the Waynesburg railroad. According to *The Jeffersonian*, the idea met with "general good feeling."<sup>5</sup> Afterwards, the two men then went straight to the president of the Reading Railroad Company with their plan and managed to secure an investment commitment which enabled them to submit a petition for incorporation to the Pennsylvania Legislature on April 3, 1869.<sup>6</sup> The terms of the agreement were quite generous on the part of the Reading Railroad Company. According to Oberholtzer's speech, the railroad offered a \$30,000 investment in cash, agreed to underwrite all necessary loans, administer the bond payments, and offer freight discounts of up to \$100 in value to bond holders.<sup>7</sup> The grading, bridging, laying of rails and provisions for rolling stock for the route were also to be furnished by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company. What the railroad's motivations were is unclear, although Oberholtzer said that the president had made a similar proposition to promoters of the Perkiomen Railroad.

Subscription books were opened the week of May 29, 1869 at the Eagle Tavern in Byers, Upper Uwchlan Township; Charles Dean's home in Chester Springs, West Pikeland Township; and Moses King's Store in Charlestown Township.<sup>8</sup> The Act of Incorporation stated that the capital stock of the company was to be \$100,000 divided into shares worth \$50 a piece. Reading Railroad became principal shareholder with 1,200

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<sup>5</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 19 December 1868.

<sup>6</sup> Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania." Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>7</sup> Speech, "Address to the People on the Construction of a Railroad," n.d., Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>8</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 1 January 1869, p. 3, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.



shares, an action specifically granted in Section 2 of the Act.<sup>9</sup>

The remaining 200+ shares were acquired by local residents. A list of stockholders dated January 13, 1873 indicates that the balance between corporately held shares and privately owned shares evened out slightly with the passage of time. In that year, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company owned 1,232 shares, roughly two thirds of the total amount. The remaining 700+ shares were divided among 186 shareholders.<sup>10</sup> Many people owned between one and five shares, although the thirteen members of the Board of Directors, which included: Levi Prizer, Elias Oberholtzer, Samuel Hallman, Joseph Tustin, Holland Brownback, James Boyd, Jacob Rixstine, John Oberholtzer, Jonathan Reese, B.F. Bean, Dr. Morris Fussel, Joseph Butler, and John Todd, owned larger blocks of stock ranging from ten to thirty shares.

The directors also held a significant number of railroad bonds as well. As the deadline of January 31, 1870 neared, the secretary of the company made an appeal to the directors and others present at the meeting to dig deep and subscribe more bond payments. That initial request raised a commitment of \$30,600 from eleven men. Twelve others then came forward with an additional \$24,900 in pledges which were contingent on "the condition that the road be put under contract the following spring."<sup>11</sup> It took much cajoling on the part of the directors to secure the necessary number of subscriptions, but the goal was met late in January of 1870. In a letter to James Boyd, Oberholtzer confides. "We congratulate ourselves on the result, for from beginning to end it has been both arduous and vexatious."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Copy of The Pickering Valley Railroad Charter, "An Act to Incorporate the Pickering Valley Railroad Company," 3 April 1869, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 383, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>10</sup> List of Stockholders of the Pickering Valley Railroad Co. Entitled to Vote January 13, 1873, Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company Records, Box 385, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>11</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 10 January 1870, p. 15, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, John Oberholtzer to James Boyd, 31 January 1870, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 886, The Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.



### Controversy Over the Route

The main cause of vexation was brought on by the directors' indecisiveness about the path the route would take. The Company was given "the authority to construct a railroad from a point upon the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad either at or near the mouth of the Pickering Creek or at or near the mouth of the French Creek in Chester county to a point at or near to the Eagle Tavern in the same County."<sup>13</sup> Selecting the point of origination became a highly charged issue during the next two years as interested parties vied to have the route cross their land. This would allow them to make valuable damage claims, while insuring their relative proximity to a station. It should be noted that the controversy surrounded the eastern half of the route, not the western half. The majority of the Board of Directors lived in Chester Springs, Lionville, and Eagle on the western end of the line. These villages all had confirmed stations from the beginning.<sup>14</sup> There was not a director hailing from either Kimberton or Charlestown Village on the eastern end of the route, however, and neither group of supporters had a decided advantage in determining the point of origination of the route, a factor that probably dragged out the struggle longer than necessary.

The merits of both the Pickering Creek and French Creek routes were hotly debated. A variety of surveys were made by Reading's appointed engineer C.E. Byers, after whom Byers Station was named. The first was commissioned in August of 1869.<sup>15</sup> Other informal surveys, however, had been made prior to the incorporation of the company, and a mass of conflicting information circulated throughout the townships

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<sup>13</sup> Copy of The Pickering Valley Railroad Charter, "An Act to Incorporate the Pickering Valley Railroad Company," 3 April 1869, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 383, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>14</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 1 May 1869, p. 7, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>15</sup> "Engineer to survey and locate road (PVRR)- On motion resolved that C.E. Byers the company's engineer with his assistants, proceed without delay to survey and ascertain the best location for our road from a point upon the Philadelphia and Reading railroad either at or near the mouth of the Pickering Creek or French Creek in Chester County to a point at or near the Eagle Tavern in the same county and report it to the boards." Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 5 August 1869, p. 9, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.





involved.<sup>16</sup> The tension mounted as community residents tried to gauge the likelihood of a particular route's success and then committed their investments in the line accordingly. In a letter written that September, Oberholtzer recognized that "we meet with a great deal of opposition from 'Old Fogies' and those wanting different routes."<sup>17</sup> In another letter dated October 25, 1869, he further expressed his anxiety over the situation. In it he tells James Boyd that he feels the uncertainty surrounding the venture is negatively impacting the bond subscription, and that the route should be settled so that the process can move ahead.<sup>18</sup>

Initially the favored route followed the Pickering Creek, from its mouth through Mosesville and Charlestown Village where it cut north towards the Eagle Tavern. A local editorial stated that "...it would make a splendid road, easy opened, small grade, and light damages, as it does not effect much but pasture lands."<sup>19</sup> The author condemned what he believed were misguided attempts to promote the French Creek Route implying that the route would only be a few hundred feet shorter, but would bring higher damage costs as "farms would be cut into wedges, diamonds, and many other shapes." He also claims that the French Creek route ran "entirely away from seven merchant, cotton, and other mills."

The French Creek route, however, had powerful supporters. The Phoenix Iron Company's route to Lancaster had not yet developed, and they were still scheming to tailor the Pickering Valley Railroad line to suit their own needs. John Oberholtzer met with President Gowan in October of 1869, when the prospect of making the Pickering line a branch of a larger French Creek Line was once again presented. The suggestion

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<sup>16</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 6 February 1869.

<sup>17</sup> Letter, Oberholtzer to Boyd, 15 October 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>18</sup> Letter, Oberholtzer to Boyd, 25 October 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE. It is fortunate that this set of letters between Oberholtzer and Boyd has been preserved. Boyd lived in Norristown, and it is likely that Oberholtzer felt the need to keep him informed of issues as they arose, since it is likely that he was unable to attend meetings regularly. They concisely document the difficulties of local politics as applied to the railroad situation.

<sup>19</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 19 March 1870.



was taken as an insult, and fireworks erupted. Oberholtzer described his response to the encounter in a letter to James Boyd:

I wrote to President Gowan not to entertain for a moment any such idea. We have spent too much time and labor working this thing up to play at last into the hands of the Phoenix Iron Company. We have no notion whatever of playing second fiddle to their road. If we cannot have an independent road, we are nearly as well of without any. Let us stick to the route as located and let the French Creek people build their own.<sup>20</sup>

The community's ego had been bruised by the thought that the whims of industry could so easily brush away all their previous endeavors. It was clear that agricultural interests had been overpowered by those of big business.

A few months later, Gowan approached the directors with a number of concessions. If the Pickering Valley Railroad was surveyed along the northerly route, originating at the mouth of the French Creek and running through Kimberton, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company was willing to make it the trunk line instead of the branch, offer an additional purchase of \$50,000 in stock, and guarantee rights of way from Kimberton east to Phoenixville.<sup>21</sup> While the offer was not immediately accepted, Oberholtzer's attitude did shift. Perhaps he was thinking of his earlier letter to Boyd which conveyed his apprehension that their bond subscriptions might fall short when the January deadline came. He was not willing to let go of the dream, however. "we are not going to give up this road because every dollar cannot be raised along the route." he stated, "not one road in fifty is built by subscription."<sup>22</sup> In his estimation they needed an additional \$50,000. The \$50,000 offer from Reading would allow him to beat those odds. In the end of his letter to Boyd, he is already creating a justification to accept the offer stating that its benefits make the offer worth considering. His letter closes with the

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<sup>20</sup> Letter, Oberholtzer to Boyd, 4 October 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, Oberholtzer to Boyd, 8 December 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>22</sup> Oberholtzer to Boyd, 15 September 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.



following statement:

I fear from what I can learn and from my own observation that the people on the *lower end* of the Pickering have an eye more toward the profits that will accrue to themselves from prospective damages than to the assisting of building this road by subscriptions. We are determined that this road shall be built. If we cannot raise the money on one route, I shall not object to taking one upon which we can raise it.<sup>23</sup>

In the end those who "gave time and trouble, and subscribed of their means for the building of the road along the *Pickering Creek* as was fully understood" were sorely disappointed.<sup>24</sup> The fourteen mile Pickering Creek route through Charlestown survived the following two months, but by the beginning of April the Board of Directors announced that the French Creek route had gained final approval.<sup>25</sup> The proposed thirteen mile route would connect Phoenixville with Kimberton, Chester Springs and Eagle. It is notable, that the towns of Cambria and Pikeland, which emerged as prominent stations once the rail line was installed, were not consequential enough to be mentioned at that time. The route followed both the French and Pickering Creeks, although the line retained its original name of the Pickering Valley Railroad. The name had been conferred during the January 2, 1868 meeting of the company on the motion of Charles Dean, and it probably remained a matter of consternation for Charlestown area residents long after the line was finally laid.<sup>26</sup>

The controversy did not end once the requisite number of bond subscriptions were met, nor did it end when the final route was determined. The next stage involved the appraisal of damages along the line, a task to which Elias Oberholtzer and Joseph Tustin were appointed because "they are well-respected, popular, and can devote the necessary

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<sup>23</sup> Letter, Oberholtzer to Boyd, 8 December 1869, Box 886, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>24</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 19 March 1870.

<sup>25</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 2 April 1870.

<sup>26</sup> "Minutes of the Railroad Meeting (Not yet PVR) held at Chester Springs Saturday January 2nd 1868," Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscript Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



time to it." <sup>27</sup> They were advised to be flexible in fixing the path of the line, since the company preferred to receive a voluntary release rather than participate in litigation over damages.

Concerns about the specific location of the line's terminus were also raised. The property surrounding that location would become extremely valuable. Being the last station on the line meant that that location would attract patrons, not only within the existing town and nearby countryside, but also those farther west for whom the Pickering Valley Railroad would still be the most convenient line. A significant amount of freight was expected to be shipped out from that point, and a number of jobs with the railroad would be created. Oberholtzer stated that while damages and construction costs should be carefully considered, those who had put up money firsthand should receive special consideration in the final decision. This was a long standing policy that had been voiced when the first surveys were conducted in 1868.<sup>28</sup>

Byers Station was built at the terminus of the rail line, but lobbyists were soon trying to convince the company to extend the line on towards Milford Mills or Dorlan's Station a few miles farther west.<sup>29</sup> The Act of Incorporation permitted the road to make an extension of up to twenty miles. A number of Upper Uwchlan residents like Joseph McClure owned factories in the central part of that township which would have been well-served by the rail line. A committee was appointed to ascertain whether or not sufficient bond subscriptions could be made to finance the extension. In January of 1871, engineers surveyed the proposed extension and provided a cost estimate. Despite rumors

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<sup>27</sup> Letter, John Oberholtzer to James Boyd, 7 February 1870, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 886, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>28</sup> "Minutes of the Railroad Meeting (Not yet PVR) held at Chester Springs Saturday January 2nd 1868," Elias Oberholtzer Papers, Manuscript Division, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>29</sup> "Dr. McClure and Evan Evans being present from Milford Mills, urging the extension of the road to that point. It was moved by Samuel Butler that a committee be appointed to see what amount of stock could be procured towards said extension." Letter Fragment, n.d. Elias Oberholtzer Papers. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.





to the contrary, the proposal was not acted upon.<sup>30</sup>

The proposal rested for several years until January of 1873 when the committee again approached the directors. They were referred to President Gowan of the Reading Railroad Company<sup>31</sup>. The passage of several years would have shown Gowan that the spur was not destined to make a profit.<sup>32</sup> The company would need Reading's financial support for the extension, and it had become obvious that such a commitment of financial reserves would be foolish. The extension never happened, and the directors owning property in Byers remained contented, as they reaped the rewards of their savvy real estate investments. Only one other branch line was ever constructed. It was a narrow gauge railroad laid specifically for transporting marble and granite from the quarries near the Falls of the French Creek to Phoenixville. The line met the Pickering Valley Railroad on the east side of Kimberton paralleling the French Creek. It proved to be an unprofitable enterprise, however, and was discontinued at the turn of this century.<sup>33</sup>

#### Construction of the Railroad

Construction of the line began in the summer of 1870, and the last section of rail was installed on the 16 September 1871, although construction of supplemental structures like depots continued for several more months.<sup>34</sup> That year, the quiet of the Chester Valley was disrupted; "the beautiful stretch of soft green sweeping up into wood-crowned hills" was marred by the activities of grading and construction; and "the substantial looking farmhouses nestled down every here and there" were accosted by the

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<sup>30</sup> "Rumored - Rumors are afloat that the Pickering Valley Railroad is to be extended during the coming summer. As to direction, Milford Upper Uwehlan is said to be favorably spoken of." *The Jeffersonian*, 14 January 1871.

<sup>31</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 13 January 1873, p. 45, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>32</sup> Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>33</sup> • Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA. • "French Creek. River of Destiny," *Chester County Day Paper*, October 3, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 16 September 1871.



clamor of progress.<sup>35</sup> Three separate contractors worked on the road, and shanties were erected at intervals along the line for the workmen.<sup>36</sup>

J.S. Himes lived south of Chester Springs and entries in his diary from 1870 provide a few observations on the construction of the line.<sup>37</sup> He noted some of the changes that were being undertaken, like the construction of shanties nearby. On May 25, 1870 he also noted that Joseph Hartman and Joseph Tustin had orders from the Reading Railroad Company to move their buildings which indicates that structures were relocated during the construction period. By August the work pace had increased. According to Himes, "The Pickering Valley Railroad has received many reinforcements within the last two weeks and several gangs of men are now taking out stone for bridges. A smith shop has been erected at Pugh's field in which they propose doing their own smithing."<sup>38</sup> This statement shows that readily available local materials were used in the construction project, and that much of the work was done on site. His observation also makes the point that large numbers of outsiders took up short-term residence in villages along the rail line. This would have had a perceptible impact on the daily business of these small towns. The old and established citizens mixed with their new and unknown visitors. Some residents like Thomas Pugh "took some horses and men to board" for the duration, managing to make a small profit from the inconvenience.<sup>39</sup>

As work progressed, streams were bridged, trestles were raised, and fields were crossed. The abstract concept of the Pickering Valley Railroad which had aroused so much fervor, controversy, and support was finally taking on a physical form. Its passage through the valley would enable the continued evolution of this cultural landscape. It brought with it a sense of pride and a sense of hope. The valley was now intimately

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<sup>35</sup> The quotes are from a description of the Chester Valley written by a girl visiting from Philadelphia. *The Daily Local*, 16 September 1878.

<sup>36</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 18 June 1870.

<sup>37</sup> Diary, J.S. Himes, 1870, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>38</sup> Diary, J.S. Himes, 13 August 1870, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>39</sup> Diary, J.S. Himes, 15 August 1870, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.



connected to the region and to Philadelphia, and through this connection residents could actively participate in the future of the nation. The railroad also brought less heady changes: fields that were divided by the rails now had to be connected via underpasses, millers had to deal with inconsiderate workers who threw waste ash and cinders down into their races causing inconvenient clogs, trestles cut through the heart of villages like Pikeland bringing the smoky, noisy engines up to the level of nearby windows.<sup>40</sup> Sarah Walton, who grew up in one of the houses next to the trestles, remembered how the bed in her room used to literally shake when the trains came through.<sup>41</sup> But these complaints arose many years after the line had opened. In the intervening decades, the novelty of the train had slowly faded, and mundane concerns overtook the exuberance felt when the line was first put through.

The opening of the Railroad was a much anticipated event. The administrative reigns were handed over to the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company on September 20, 1871 after they signed the twenty-nine year leasing agreement. The agreement stated that they would pay the Pickering Valley Railroad Company one third of the freight receipts for use of the line which then would be used to repay interest on the bonds that had been issued.<sup>42</sup> An excursion train of fifteen passenger cars, four freight cars, and several baggage cars set out from Phoenixville that morning. The cars were packed with celebrants eager to take part in the landmark occasion. Unfortunately, the load, which included three Sunday School groups and many others, overcame the power

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<sup>40</sup> •"Kimberton in the 1890's," John Funk, *The Daily Republican*, 19 January 1970. •Letter from Allen Simmers to the Pickering Valley Railroad Company, 11 July 1904, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1035, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE. • *Daily Local*, 19 December 1906.

<sup>41</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>42</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 8 January 1872, p. 32, Philadelphia and Reading Company Archives, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.





Fig. 54 Houses nestled along the railroad tracks in Pikeland, East Pikeland Township.  
•For a while the village was also known as Mosesville and McKinleyville depending on who the largest property owner was. Note the proximity of the surviving trestles to the houses.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 55 Close-up view of surviving trestle in the village of Pikeland.  
•Local sources said that Mr. Hallman, the owner of the local store and the property on which the trestles sit, was offered a suitable sum of money by the railroad company so they would not have to go to the trouble of having the piers removed.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.





of the single engine and brought the trip to a sudden halt: "It was expedient to have another engine. This was procured and attached to the rear of the train, when all went along peacefully and quietly."<sup>43</sup> The event was then commemorated with a festive "Basket Pic-Nic" held at Oberholtzer's Grove in West Pikeland.<sup>44</sup> Looking back at the troubled financial history of the railroad, however, it would appear that this initial difficulty was an ill-omen. It could be said that the hopes and expectations which were heaped upon this line served not to raise its productivity, but instead to weigh it down and shorten its life.

The first printed rail schedule showed the passage of six trains a day, three "going up - westward" and three "coming down - eastward." The first train started from Byers at 6:20 AM to make the milk run, and the last left Phoenixville at 6:10 PM.<sup>45</sup> Another timetable from 1875 shows the addition of two Sunday trains. Eight stops were designated: Phoenixville, French Creek, Kimberton, Pikeland, Chester Springs, Cambria, Lionville, and Byers. According to John Funk who grew up in the area during the late nineteenth century, the line had two types of stations:

There were several stations along the way. Some were manned with a Station Agent; others were flag stations by which the patrons could stop all trains by simply pulling a lever to raise a stop sign, signaling the engine crew to stop.<sup>46</sup>

The flag stations included: Main Street in Phoenixville, Iron Side, Hallman's, and Pikeland. The remaining five stations retained a station agent, due to the high volume of traffic and freight they encountered. The Main Street station was added shortly after completion of the line at the petition of riders who wished to do business in the city of Phoenixville.<sup>47</sup> The terminal station of the east end of the line was located on the outskirts of the city, and riders wanted a stop in the center of town. A station house was

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<sup>43</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 30 September 1871.

<sup>44</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 22 July 1871.

<sup>45</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 30 September 1871.

<sup>46</sup> "Kimberton in the 1890's," John L. Funk. *The Daily Republican*, 5 December 1969.

<sup>47</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 7 October 1871.



# Philadelphia & Reading Railroad.

## PICKERING VALLEY BRANCH

### TIME TABLE NO. 7,

COMMENCING MONDAY, NOV. 1st, 1875.

UP TRAINS—Westward.					Distance.	STATIONS.	Distance.	DOWN TRAINS—Eastward.				
SUNDAY.								SUNDAY.				
111 Pass.	105 Pass.	11 Pass.	7 Mixed	5 Mixed				12½ Pass.	8 Mixed	4 Pass.	112½ Pass.	101 Pass.
P. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.			
5.50	9.35	5.50	8.05	9.05	0	PHENIXVILLE,	11	6.45	1.50	4.45	6.45	5.20
5.53	9.38	5.53	8.08	9.08	¼	Main Street,	10½	6.42	1.47	4.44	6.42	5.18
5.57	9.42	5.57	8.12	9.13	1¼	French Creek,	9½	6.36	1.37	4.39	6.36	5.14
6.06	9.49	6.06	8.28	9.25	¾	Kimberton,	7½	6.28	1.26	4.33	6.28	5.06
6.13	9.55	6.13	8.34	9.34	5½	Hallman's,	5½	6.21	1.16	4.28	6.21	4.59
6.19	10.01	6.19	8.39	9.41	7	Pikeland,	4	6.15	1.06	4.23	6.15	4.54
6.22	10.03	6.22	8.43	9.46	7¼	Chester Springs,	3½	6.12	1.01	4.21	6.12	4.52
6.28	10.07	6.28	8.49	9.51	9	Cambria,	2	6.07	12.52	4.17	6.07	4.47
6.30	10.09	6.30	8.51	9.53	9½	Lionville,	1½	6.05	12.47	4.15	6.05	4.45
6.35	10.15	6.35	8.55	9.57	11	BYERS,	0	6.00	12.40	4.10	6.00	4.40
P. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	A. M.				A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.

Fig. 56 Pickering Valley Railroad Time Table, 1875.  
 The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company Records, Box 1057, The Hagley  
 Museum and Archives, Manuscript Division, Wilmington, DE.



later removed from French Creek station and brought to the Main Street station where it was found to be more useful.<sup>48</sup> Hallman's station between Kimberton and Pikeland was created to serve "those residing in Charlestown and along the Pickering Creek" which was the least they could do for bond subscribers in that area after the road was rerouted.<sup>49</sup>

The naming of the stations offered some excitement in the months preceding the opening. When given the opportunity to select a name for the station near his tavern, William Rhoades, eccentric proprietor of The General Pike Hotel, put forth "the highly euphonious appellation of Jigwater." That appellation did not meet with wide acceptance, and instead the rather plain name of French Creek was selected, though it later went by the more colorful name of Ironside.<sup>50</sup> The naming of Cambria Station was also the source of some contention. Mr. Oberholtzer felt that considering his role in the promotion of the railroad, and due to the fact that he was building the depot at that station, he should have the opportunity to name it. His selection was Vernal Banks, the name of his personal residence. The Chief Engineer for the Reading Company felt that Oberholtzer's suggestion was inappropriate, and that the name Pikeland "would be very suitable, after the township of that name and would not interfere with any other name on the road."<sup>51</sup> Some concessions must have been made, because the name Cambria was accepted, and the name Pikeland was selected for the station two stops east. In 1886, the Oberholtzers reasserted their influence, and the name of the station was officially changed once again, "The conductors on the Pickering Valley Railroad commenced on Sunday to call out 'Anselma' instead of Cambria. The name was given to the station in honor of Mrs. John Oberholtzer, who created or used the name in one of her poems."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Phoenixville Messenger*, 24 January 1880.

<sup>49</sup> Pickering Valley Railroad Minute Book, 8 January 1872, p. 32, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>50</sup> *The Daily Local*, 3 December 1890.

<sup>51</sup> Letter, 20 July 1871, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>52</sup> *The Daily Local*, 15 November 1886.





Fig. 57 Photograph of Anselma Station and the nearby depot in West Pikeland Township, 1937. Photograph Division, Robert Brinton. Collection. Anselma Railroad Station, 1937. Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 58 Photograph showing a subtle rise in grade, now planted in pine trees, that once carried the tracks of the Pickering Valley Railroad.  
•Located on the Horseshoe Trail, just south of Route 113.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.





Although the Pickering Valley line was primarily owned and operated by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company, it was very much a local line. Naming the stations was a way in which the community could claim the line as its own. It seems they did not need or want outside input. Community members did see fit, however, to memorialize the line's first Chief Engineer, who died before the road was completed. C.E. Byers was forever immortalized by the terminal station and the town that took his name.

The "graduation and masonry bed" of the railroad was completed in May of 1871. Embankments had been built up and ravines bridged to insure a smooth, safe railway. Masonry for the bridge came from local quarries and the iron components were, not surprisingly, shipped from nearby Phoenixville.<sup>53</sup> The remnants of these embankments can still be seen today. In some cases they assume a sculptural quality, standing tall in the midst of a rolling meadow, lately converted into a local farm's access road. In other instances, the rail bed is but a slight rise above grade, barely perceptible until raking light reveals its presence. The insertion of the railroad's infrastructure into this agricultural landscape was both subtle and meaningful. Once the construction sites were cleared and the shanties removed, the road's linear character and low profile allowed it to blend into its surroundings in the manner of other local roads. Such was not the case, however, during the six moments of the day when it served its proscribed function. Life along the route had been fundamentally changed, though the effects were not immediately discernible. Fast flowing brooks no longer set the daily pace. That role was usurped by the intermittent trains which daily traversed the fields. Not long after the Pickering Valley Railroad's completion, potential development enabled by the line began to be realized, and a new era of growth was ushered in.

#### The Introduction of Railroad Architecture

The development brought by the railroad began to alter the character of the villages, as new building types sprang up to meet the needs of the railroad itself

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<sup>53</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 3 December 1870.





Fig. 59 Overgrown hill in the midst of a field that was once an embankment for the Pickering Valley Railroad.  
•It is located on the eastern side of Route 401 above its intersection with Route 113.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 60 The former site of Anselma Station, 1994.  
•The depot is now empty, but the numerous windows are evidence of its earlier reincarnation as a poultry barn.  
•Note the level quality of the ground next to the depot where the tracks were laid.  
Photograph by the author.



and those patronizing the line. The following excerpt describes some of the accouterments that were necessary for the operation of the road:

Done at last - The main track of the Pickering Valley Railroad is laid to the terminus and workmen are busy putting in sidings, turntables, and making preparations for the erection of a commodious warehouse and depot for the accommodation of passengers.<sup>54</sup>

The needs of passengers were met more easily than those of people shipping and receiving freight. A shelter and ticket office could be built rather quickly, especially for the flag stations which had minimal accommodations. The construction of warehouses, depots, and sidings, scales, and chutes demanded a great commitment of time and resources.

During the spring of 1871, as the road reached completion, John Oberholtzer made an offer to the Reading Railroad Company. Oberholtzer agreed to donate land for a depot at Cambria Station, build the depot, allow the railroad to use office space, a waiting room, and a freight room in the building if they would agree to provide a slate roof for the building, maintain the structure, and appoint him agent.<sup>55</sup> The proposal was accepted and the depot built, although the legalities of ownership and financial responsibility for the structure provided cause for bickering over the years. Correspondence shows that the Reading Company did not wish to pay for the construction of a platform and siding at Cambria since it was considered "a private station."<sup>56</sup> Mr. Oberholtzer, however, also tried to take advantage of the situation. Later that July he requested that a set of board steps be built by the Reading Company from the station down the slope to his house so that his picnic grounds could be reached more easily.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 16 September 1871.

<sup>55</sup> Letter, Chief Engineer C.E. Byers to Gen. Superintendent G.A. Nichols, 20 March 1871, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>56</sup> Letter, 27 September 1871, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, 20 July 1871, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.





Fig. 61 Photograph of the Anselma Station depot.  
•The structure formerly housed a local store, a freight storage room, offices for the railroad employees, and a waiting area for passengers. It is now empty.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 62 Photograph of the Chester Springs depot.  
•Note the similarity in shape to the depot at Anselma. The proportions are nearly identical. This building is still used for commercial purposes.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.







He was a man of strategy and entrepreneurial spirit who sought to raise the area around Cambria, which was not really even a village, from a simple mill crossroads to a position of social prominence in the community. By garnering a station, as well as control over the depot, Oberholtzer had guaranteed a steady stream of visitors for his pleasure resort, Vernal Bank Grove. According to an article in *The Jeffersonian*, Oberholtzer had been "improving his naturally attractive grounds in a way of providing them with excellent water, a restaurant with dining room, speaker's stand, seats, rustic benches, swings, and other features calculated for comfort and convenience."<sup>58</sup> He offered the grounds free of charge to Sunday-school groups, those hosting social picnics, temperance rallies, and political meetings.

This article also describes the depot itself, which was said to contain, in addition to the rail facilities mentioned above, rooms for store goods, grain, feed, and general merchandise. The village eventually gained approval for the establishment of a new post office, which was located at the depot for a time. Adjoining that building were coal chutes and a lumber yard.<sup>59</sup> The heyday of the railroad fulfilled Oberholtzer's dream for the station. A notice in 1879 stated that the little station of Cambria was "said to do more business in the milk trade than any other station on that line. Twenty farmers each morning bring milk aggregating 2000 quarts, making an annual shipment of 730,000 quarts of milk."<sup>60</sup> Three years later the station was lauded on its grain shipments: "Cambria Station on the Pickering Valley Railroad is becoming quite a grain depot...farmers in that locality bring their wheat and other grain to that station for miles around and give it a lively appearance."<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the good fortune that came to Cambria (later Anselma) with the railroad, departed with the advent of the automobile

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<sup>58</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 29 July 1871.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

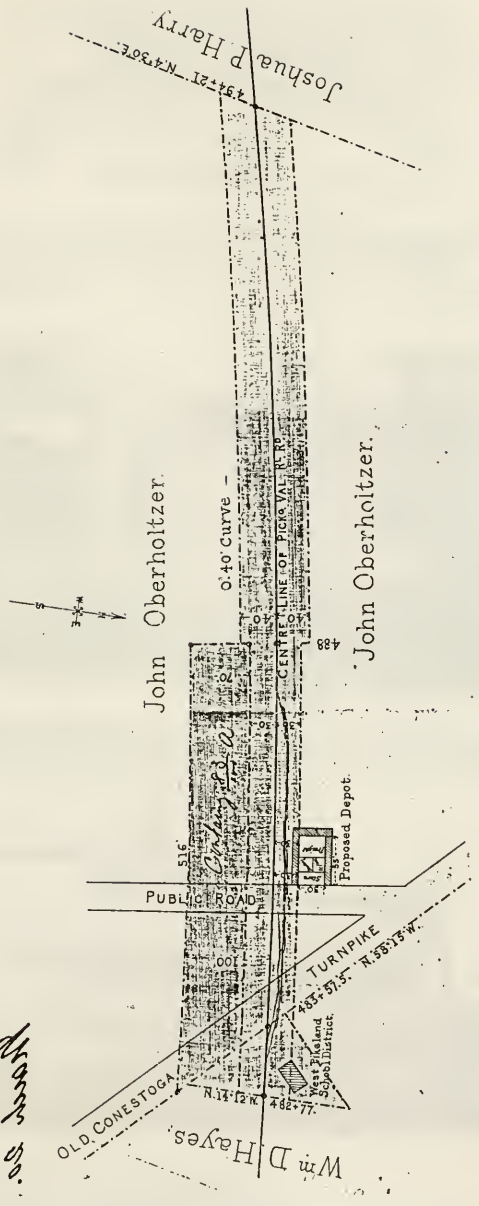
<sup>60</sup> *The Daily Local*, 18 October 1879.

<sup>61</sup> *The Daily Local*, 1 February 1881.



*Wm D Hayes*  
*1871*  
*1871*  
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*1871*

Plan showing proposed Depot & Depot-ground of the Pickering V. R. R. Co.  
 on the property of John Oberholtzer.



Scale 100 Feet to 1 Inch

Fig. 63 Proposed plan for Anselma Station, 1871.  
 The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley  
 Museum and Archives, Manuscript Division, Wilmington, DE.



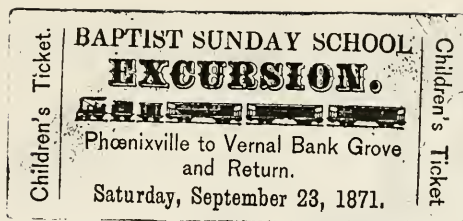


Fig. 64 Inaugural weekend ticket for the Pickering Valley Railroad offering passage to the festivities at Oberholtzer's leisure spot, Vernal Bank Grove, 1871. Ephemera Collection, Pickering Valley Railroad, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 65 Anselma Post Office, circa 1937. Photograph Division, Robert Brinton Collection, Anselma Station, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

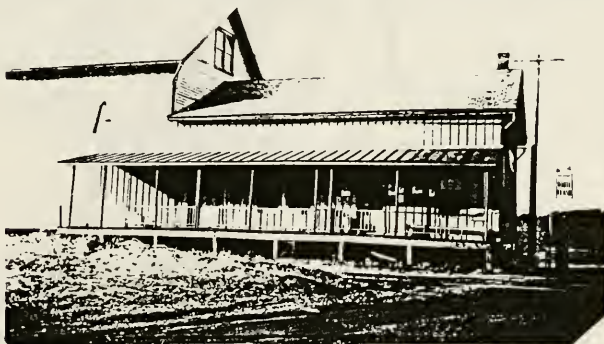


Fig. 66 Site of the first post office at Anselma Station.  
 •It was located at the general store in the depot.  
 Photograph Division, Robert Brinton Collection, Anselma Station, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.









and the construction of the state turnpike. Trucks began to carry the milk to Philadelphia, and people had less reason to patronize the local stores.

When it came to freight shipments, other stations like Chester Springs, Kimberton, and Byers offered a competitive challenge. Two years after the railroad's opening, trade along the line had increased to the extent that a freight train was desired.<sup>62</sup> The regular trains with mixed passenger and freight service did not have sufficient hauling capacity. The village of Chester Springs had its own depot that was said to measure forty feet by twenty-five feet along with the requisite coal and lumber yard.<sup>63</sup> In the following decade, business through the station had expanded to the point that a second coal and lumber yard was erected.<sup>64</sup> Chester Springs and Byers stations were also equipped with ore platforms. These platforms provided storage space for the iron ore which was regularly hauled down to Phoenixville and distributed between the Phoenix Iron Company and Monocacy furnace.<sup>65</sup> Byers and Kimberton also had stock yards, where public cattle sales were held every two weeks and twenty-five to forty cows were usually sold.<sup>66</sup> The Reading Company later considered erecting "an enclosure around the cattle bridge at Byers, for the purpose of holding cattle when about to load" in order to expand their local business in the livestock trade.<sup>67</sup>

While mining remained a rather undependable industry, the platforms and sidings erected for the distribution of heavy freight were in constant use. Shipments of coal and feed were brought in to meet the needs of the community. Chester Springs had a high demand for outside supplies due to the fact that the Soldiers' Orphans School had been established on the former Yellow Springs property in August of 1869.<sup>68</sup> It was funded

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<sup>62</sup> *The Daily Local*, 3 October 1873.

<sup>63</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 18 November 1871.

<sup>64</sup> *Phoenixville Messenger*, 17 January 1880.

<sup>65</sup> *The Daily Local*, 22 September 1879.

<sup>66</sup> *The Daily Local*, 18 March 1874.

<sup>67</sup> Letter, A. McLeod, 9 June 1891, Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>68</sup> Clifton Lisle, *History of West Pikeland Township* (Stephen Moylan Press, 1987), 20.



through a \$50,000 endowment by the Pennsylvania Railroad which was devoted to "the education and maintenance of destitute orphan children of deceased soldiers and sailors."<sup>69</sup> During its forty years of operation, the school housed several hundred children annually. The school's daily operations were greatly eased by their ready access to the railroad, and for many years they agreed to pay half the station agent's salary as compensation for the amount of traffic they brought to the town.<sup>70</sup> A request was made in 1898 to increase the extent of sidings at that station to better handle increased freight traffic:

During the next two or three months there will be considerable loading and unloading on this siding. The Soldiers' Orphans School are receiving their coal, there is feed stuffs coming in, and the Philadelphia Graphite Company want cars placed and besides other businesses existing and prospective.... As to the trade conditions noted, I gathered the information from the agent, but I would suggest that the freight department be asked if the business is simply spasmodic or likely to be such as to warrant the change.<sup>71</sup>

The final comment of the above passage brings to the surface, the tension that existed between the locals living along the line and the broader perspective of the Reading Company. The line had been losing money at a steady pace, and the Reading Company was forced to make regular advances to the Pickering Valley Railroad, so that the company could meet its bond payments. The Reading Company was wary of making any further investments in the infrastructure of this line without some guarantee that freight receipts would cover the improvements. In the end, the Reading Railroad Company decided that the situation in Chester Springs did not merit the construction of additional sidings.

This same attitude toward the line was exhibited two decades earlier in Kimberton. The Reading Company seemed unwilling to construct a freight warehouse

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<sup>69</sup> *Village Record*, 6 December 1864.

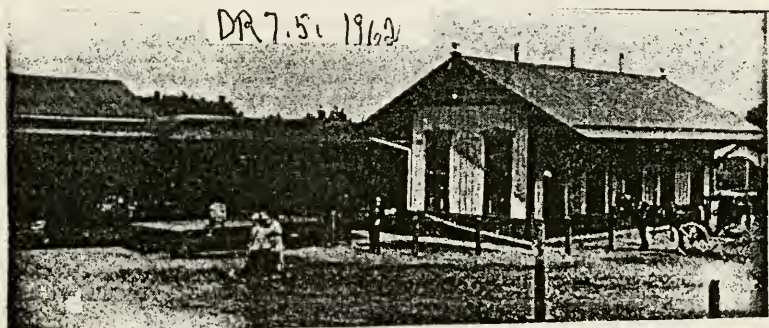
<sup>70</sup> Letter, Geo. Ziegler to W.A. Church, 29 September 1903, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>71</sup> Letter, A.M. Wilson to I.A. Sweigard, 26 October 1898, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.



**J. FRED. SHEEDER,**  
Manufacturer of  
**BINDERS' BOARDS,**  
And Dealer In  
**PAPER STOCK,**  
Kimberton, P. O. Chester Co. Pa.  
BETHCH & SON, PHILADEL.

Fig. 68 Trade Card for J. Fred Sheeder's Binders' Boards.  
Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County  
Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



## Old Kimberton Railroad Station

Fig. 69 Newspaper photograph showing Kimberton's first station before it was burned.  
*Daily Republican*, 5 July 1962, Newspaper Clippings File, Railroads - Pickering Valley  
Railroad, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



near the station, despite a large body of correspondence from local businessmen stating that it was critical to their continued patronage of the railroad. The controversy began when a complaint was lodged against Fred Sheeder, a local businessman who lived on a farm several miles outside Kimberton and operated a manufactory of binder boards. Mr. Sheeder would receive regular shipments of supplies that had to be left out on the platform until he could come and retrieve them, which could take anywhere from twelve hours to several days. The location of combustible materials so near the train tracks was logically considered a hazard.<sup>72</sup> Mr. Sheeder agreed and stated that a freight warehouse should be constructed for the storage of materials, so that they could be secure and protected from the elements, thereby eliminating the fire hazard.

This view was supported by station agent Essick. "I know of several parties who are desirous of shipping to and from here but do not, on account of there being no place to safely store their goods."<sup>73</sup> He also complained that the amount of packages, baggage, and tools being stored in the station house practically eliminated space for a proper waiting area. The station house was a new building type for these villages, and a code of railroad etiquette was quickly put into place, although it was broken just as quickly. The lack of a proper "ladies room" forced many women to proceed on to Phoenixville to catch a train rather than put up with the smell: "The one room is entirely too small for both sexes and ladies frequently stay outside in preference to going in a room full of gentlemen, especially in the morning when the milk men are here and make the room smell strongly of the stable."<sup>74</sup> Later that autumn, Kimberton residents finally got their depot, and Mr. Essick managed to have the waiting area cleaned thoroughly so as to be acceptable to the ladies.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Letter, F. Sheeder to Wooten, 15 July 1875, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1013, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>73</sup> Letter, Essick to Wooten, 7 August 1875, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Letter, Essick to Wooten, 8 October 1875, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.





Kimberton, Pa.,

Nov 21<sup>st</sup> 1902

**KIMBERTON SCALES**

Com from Charles Mangel  
To Edward Reid

Gross weight 2600

Tare 1090

Net 1510

cts.

Lewis L. Gettler Weigher

Fig. 70 Weight ticket from the scales at Kimberton Station, 1902.  
Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County  
Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 71 Chester Springs Station, 1948.  
*American Republican*, 27 May 1948, Newspaper Clipping File, Railroads - Pickering  
Valley Railroad, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



The depots, warehouses, platforms, coal chutes, and lumber yards gave testament to one function of the line, freight shipment, an activity which revolved around the calibrated scales of the rail yard where charges were assigned.<sup>76</sup> Passenger service, however, was also important. Despite the fact that Oberholtzer's argument for construction of the railroad was based almost solely on the potential resource development the railroad could bring, travel receipts for the line represented a considerable source of income.<sup>77</sup>

The station houses were rather diminutive and utilitarian and were certainly not as glamorous as those constructed along the commuter lines in Philadelphia. They offered shelter and a place to purchase tickets and send telegraphs, but were separate from the cargo / milk-loading areas of the station stop.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, none of the original stations remain, though there is some photographic documentation of the exteriors of Chester Springs and Anselma stations.<sup>79</sup> Many of these buildings survived well into the 1950's, but were destroyed during the reconfiguration of Route 113.<sup>80</sup> The photographs, which were probably taken in the 1940's, show two small structures which would have held a station agent's office and a waiting area. They were of frame construction with wood siding and side gable roofs of standing seam tin with deep eaves to protect passengers from inclement weather. There were some simple decorative brackets and window surrounds, but their overall appearance was functional and unprepossessing. Stations at the major cargo-loading points had larger stations than the flag stops. At those flag stops the station consisted of an even simpler three-sided shelter with a single

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<sup>76</sup> John Funk, "Kimberton in the 1890's," *The Daily Local*, 15 December 1969.

<sup>77</sup> Annual Statement of Receipts and Expenses of the Pickering Valley Railroad 1873 and 1876, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 886, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>78</sup> This information was offered during an interview with Sarah Walton who grew up in Pikeland during the 1920's and Lucie Windolph who grew up in the southern part of West Pikeland township during the same time. Sarah Walton and Lucie Windolph, interview by author at Historic Yellow Springs Chester County, PA, 13 February 1995.

<sup>79</sup> Railroad Stations - West Pikeland Township (Chester Springs and Anselma), Photography Collection, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>80</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.



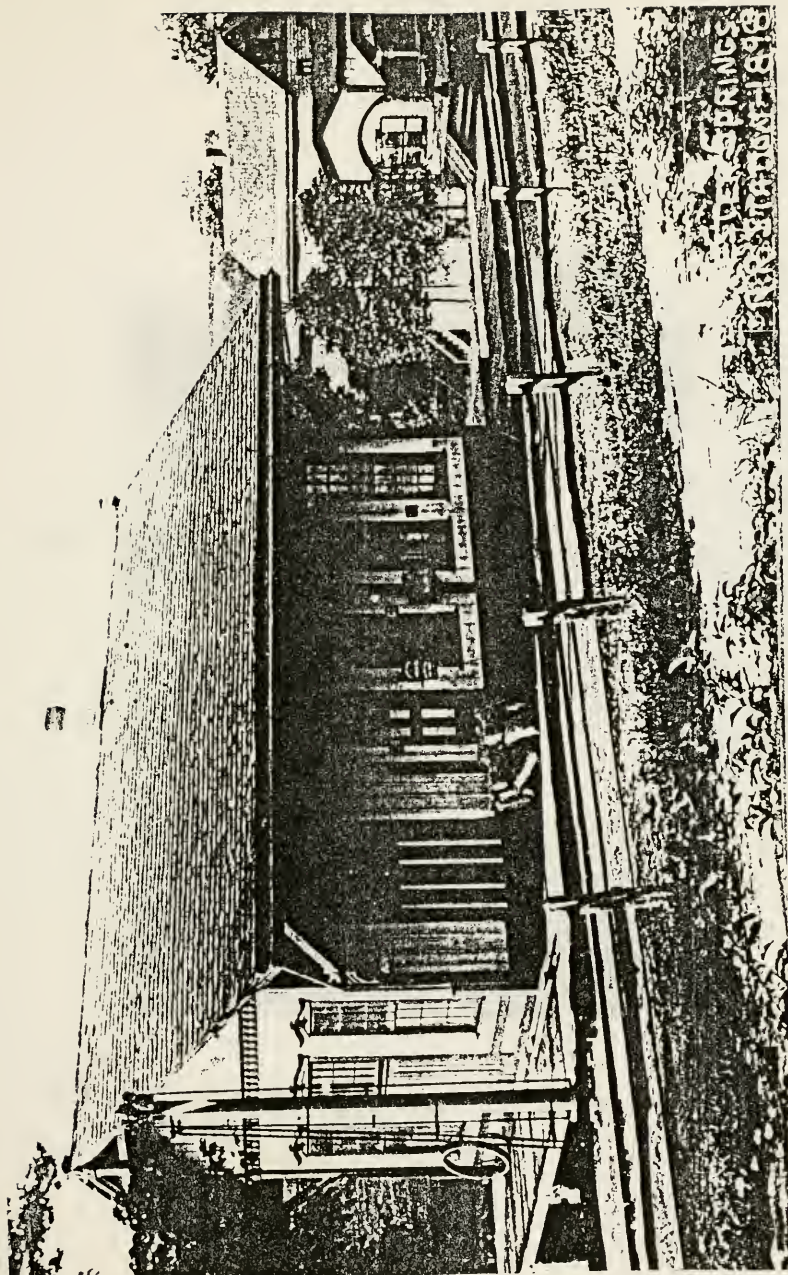


Fig. 72 Chester Springs Station, 1898  
Historic Yellow Springs, Inc., Archives, Chester Springs, PA.







Fig. 73 Anselma Station and surrounding landscape, 1937.  
Photograph Collection, Railroad Stations - West Pkkeland Township - Anselma, Chester  
County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 74 Byers Station and Depot, 1937.  
Photograph Collection, Railroad Stations - Upper Uwchlan Township - Byers, Chester  
County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.







Fig. 75 Kimberton Station in East Pikeland Township, rebuilt in 1918.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



wooden bench.<sup>81</sup> Kimberton station maintains the scale of the original stations, although it was rebuilt in 1918 after a fire consumed its predecessor. The materials used in the replacement station include brick and slate, which presents a showier appearance than the first stations had. The contract specifications for this station are held by the Hagley Museum and the original drawings are on file at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Station agents and their local patrons were fiercely possessive of these structures. They must have appeared as icons of progress, portals through which excursions, routine or extraordinary, were launched. They were gathering spots for the community where rallies were held and political poles were raised (In 1880 a 175 foot wooden pole was erected at Byers station which held a 20 foot flag and streamers extolling the Garfield /Arthur ticket).<sup>82</sup> They were the sites of the first local telegraphs, and later pay telephones, which put these village into immediate contact with the rest of the country.<sup>83</sup> The importance of a station to a community's self-worth can be seen in a heated exchange between the Chester Springs' station agent and J.E. Wooten, General Superintendent of the line. The agent had been accused of insubordination, but wrote Wooten defending his actions. The situation arose when a storm caused damage to the roof of the outhouse at the station, and despite numerous requests to have it repaired the situation remained unresolved:

I am well aware that Chester Springs is an "out of the way" station. I recognize the subordinate position I occupy. Yet I hold that towards the traveling community - the ladies especially - who arrive and depart at this station, some respect at least should be shown. For I must confess that I felt ashamed on account of the condition in which the water closet was by reason of the rain, which not only beat through the aperture, but saturated

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<sup>81</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>82</sup> *The Daily Local*, 7 October 1880.

<sup>83</sup> • Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA. • Letter, Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Company, 26 December 1901, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives.



the floor and seats.<sup>84</sup>

The stations and their supporting structures were the gateways that welcomed visitors to the town. These structures framed one's first sensory experience of the place. Allowing them to acquire a worn, disheveled appearance was equivalent to show utter disrespect for one's own hometown. It is true, that the station houses saw a great deal of wear. Almost all roads of this era were unpaved, and mud dragged in off the streets was a constant problem. There are several letters in the Pickering Valley Railroad correspondence files in which frustrated station agents petition the Reading Company for an allocation of funds to have the station houses cleaned, the floors scrubbed, and the floor matting replaced.<sup>85</sup> Now these stations are gone. Their frame structures were not meant for permanence, especially when subjected to such heavy wear and deferred maintenance. The rail line died out before they could be renewed. Only Kimberton station, a 1918 replacement, bears witness to the turn of the century belief that trains would remain a community fixture for decades to come.

#### The Railroad's Influence on Economic Development: Agricultural Products

Kimberton made a name for itself as a major shipping center on the line. A significant increase in produce shipments from the area were expected to happen once the line opened:

The market men from this township feel that the Pickering Valley R.R. will greatly facilitate in transporting their produce to city markets. On last Tuesday there were about 4000 weight of produce loaded at Kimberton Station.<sup>86</sup>

The amount of freight being shipped continued to grow and, in 1882, an assistant agent had to be hired for the station.<sup>87</sup> According to *The Daily Local*, 900,000 pounds of

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<sup>84</sup> Letter, G.O. Shaver to J.E. Wooten, 1 April 1876, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Letter, A. Loomis to E. Wooten, 27 April 1876, Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>86</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 30 September 1871.

<sup>87</sup> *The Daily Local*, 22 June 1882.



No. 1156 Kimberton, Pa., 1899

M. *Mingle*

To MICHAEL TOWERS, Dr.

To manufacture of 4 Gals. Cider, @ \$ 4.00

To " " ft. Lumber, @ \$

Received Payment,

*1000*

Fig. 76 Bill for processing local apples into cider, 1899. Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

*M. O. Shewman*

TO PIKELAND CREAMERY (Limited) DR.,

MANUFACTURERS OF

BUTTER AND CHEESE.

Cambria Station, Pa., March 8,

1884

Feb 8	To	25# Butter	- @ 39	\$ 9 75-
" 15	"	30	" . 38	11 40
" 22	"	35	" . 38	13 30
" 29	"	"	" . 38	13 30
				47.75-
<i>Rec'd payment.</i>				
<i>C. A. Brown</i>				

Fig. 77 Bill for butter that was locally made at the Pikeland Creamery in Cambria, 1884. Ephemera Collection, West Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.





produce were sent through Kimberton in 1884.<sup>88</sup> The type of produce naturally varied from season to season, and fall shipments often carried hundreds of gallons of cider: "About 5,000 gallons of cider were shipped this fall (1874) from Byers, in Upper Uwchlan, to Philadelphia to be converted into champagne cider."<sup>89</sup>

Kimberton was also known for its shipments of milk and dairy products. For many years, dairy farmers who lived a sufficient distance from the market had to churn their cream into butter, because butter kept longer than milk and was more readily transported. Local creameries enabled farmers to deliver their milk to one of the local operations (there were creameries in Kimberton, Anselma, and Byers) and receive immediate payment. In 1883, the Pikeland Creamery offered 4.5¢ a quart for the 66,000 pounds of milk they received daily.<sup>90</sup> The creameries would do the processing themselves and transport the butter and cheese that was made to the city markets.<sup>91</sup> The creameries were generally local operations, which were funded by stock subscription, and supported by local farmers.<sup>92</sup> The size of these operations had grown tremendously, and new technology was combined with traditional refrigeration methods to meet the increasing demand for processing. Ice houses were still used to keep the milk cool, but steam power was employed to extract ever larger blocks of ice from local ponds.<sup>93</sup> These large blocks could then be transported by rail to waiting ice houses at various creameries.<sup>94</sup> When the railroad connected these villages to the Philadelphia market, they were able to ship milk as well. Every morning the milk train would leave from Byers heading towards Phoenixville. Along the way, the twenty-quart milk cans, which were fresh from the spring house, where they had been cooling since the previous evening's milking, would

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<sup>88</sup> *The Daily Local*, 10 January 1885.

<sup>89</sup> *The Daily Local*, 14 December 1874.

<sup>90</sup> *The Daily Local*, 20 March 1883.

<sup>91</sup> According to John Funk, the Kimberton creamery returned the whey to the farmers after the butter was made. They used the whey as a base feed for their pigs. • *The Daily Local*, 5 December 1969.

<sup>92</sup> *The Daily Local*, 4 April 1882.

<sup>93</sup> *The Daily Local*, 28 January 1888.

<sup>94</sup> *The Daily Local*, 8 July, 1887.



*Kimberton, Pa., May 15th, 1885.*

*Dear Sir*

*In February last an assessment of forty [40] cents per Share was levied against each Share of the "Capital Stock" of*

**The French Creek Creamery Association.**

*If I do not receive the amount assessed against the Stock of the Association, shown by its books to be held by you, on or before the 25th day of May, 1885, I, as Treasurer of said Association, will proceed to collect said assessment (with costs of collection) according to law and without further notice.*

**J. FRED. SHEEDER, Treasurer.**

Fig. 78 A stock assessment notice for the French Creek Creamery Association, another locally supported dairy processing concern in the Pickering Valley area. East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



Fig. 79 Kimberton Dairy Tag. Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



be collected.<sup>95</sup> In 1873, the average daily amount of milk shipped by the railroad was nine-hundred gallons.<sup>96</sup> Mr. Oberholtzer's hopes for the community had finally materialized. The Pickering Valley was no longer a backwater, the railroad had brought both opportunity and credibility.

#### Light Industry and Commercial Enterprise

Access to railroad facilities also helped to spur development in Kimberton. A variety of business enterprises located there including: a coaling business and feed store, a machine shop, a foundry, a wagonworks, a window frame and sash company, a creamery, and an icehouse.<sup>97</sup> Slowly it became apparent, that the economies of Kimberton and the other villages on the line were undergoing a steady transformation. Their agricultural products were no longer destined for a community market, they were intended for consumption by those living many miles distant. Materials such as coal, cut lumber, commercial fertilizers, and machinery which once had to be purchased in Phoenixville and brought home by wagon, were now delivered quickly by rail to the awaiting platforms of each village.

Dealerships in all manner of goods soon opened. Commerce had come to the Pickering Valley, and soon station agents were met with requests by private parties to put up "nicely framed advertisements in the depot."<sup>98</sup> The railroad made it possible for each village to have their own independent store, despite the limited populations they served. Residents like J.S. Himes no longer had to make a difficult trip to White Horse Station or West Chester for store goods, because the railroad enabled nearby shopkeepers like David Opperman of Opperman's Corner to stock the best commercial products like

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<sup>95</sup> *The Daily Local*, 15 December 1969.

<sup>96</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 June 1873.


<sup>97</sup> Estelle Cremers, *30,000 Acres: Vincent and Pikeland Townships 1686-1850* (Limerick, PA: Holcomb Studios, 1989), 101.

<sup>98</sup> Letter, Dickinson to Wooten, 24 April 1875, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1006, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.



**Oberholtzer & Hartman,**  
 CAMBRIA STATION,  
 PICKERING VALLEY RAILROAD.  
 Have constantly on hand, for sale, a good  
 assortment of LUMBER and SHINGLES,  
 COAL, STORE GOODS, SALT, BRAN, &c.  
 BLACKSMITH'S COAL, PRIME CLOVER  
 SEED, COPE'S SUPER-PHOSPHATE, PLASTER-  
 ING HAIR, BUILDING HARDWARE, WILEY,  
 PITTSBURG and HECKERDORN TLOW CAST-  
 INGS, SEED OATS, which they will sell low for  
 Cash. Cash paid for Grain, Hides and old Iron.  
 mar30-17

58. 21. 1872

**COPE'S**   
 PURE DISSOLVED  
 BONE AND AMMONIATED  
 SUPER-PHOSPHATES,  
 FOR SALE BY  
**OBERHOLTZER & HARTMAN,**  
 Cambria Station,  
 Pickering Valley Railroad.



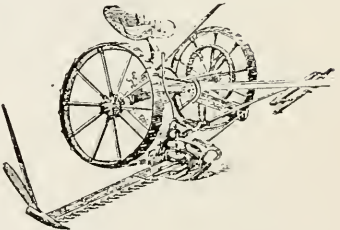
510. 26. 1872  
 **OBERHOLTZER & HARTMAN,**  
 CAMBRIA,  
 PICKERING VALLEY RAILROAD.  
 Dealer in GRAIN, COAL, LUMBER,  
 Feed, &c. Cash paid for Hides and Old Iron, at the  
 highest market rates. Tar Rope for tying fodder,  
 cheaper than straw; Yellow Pine Flooring; Heavy  
 Sixed Pine Shingles, Palling, Beam Weights, Plasterers'  
 Hair, Salt, and a full assortment of STORE  
 GOODS constantly on hand and for sale cheap. oct26


Fig. 80 Advertisement for Oberholtzer's general store in Cambria / Anselma.  
 •The emphasis of this notice is on construction materials and agricultural wares for the coming spring planting season.  
*The Jeffersonian*, 30 March 1872, Newspaper Clippings File, West Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



**DODGE'S PATENT  
 REAPER AND  
 MOWER  
 & Self Raker**  
 OHIO'S SUCCESSIVE PATENTS  
 GUARANTEED  
 DODGE & STEVENSON MFG CO. Auburn, N.Y.

**W. V. RAMBO,**  
 DEALER IN ALL KINDS OF  
 Agricultural Machinery  
**CUCUMBER PUMPS,  
 Fertilizers & Nursery Stock.**



 All kinds of Agricultural Machinery either kept on hand, or furnished at shortest notice.

*Eagle Hotel, Uwchlan P. O., Chester Co., Pa., Aug 1<sup>st</sup> 1872*

Fig. 81 Letterhead for W.V. Rambo's store in Byers, 1872.  
 •Note the emphasis on mechanization and commercially produced fertilizers.  
 Ephemera Collection, Upper Uwchlan Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.







Royal Poultry Food **MAKES HENS LAY** Cures, Gapes, Roup, Cholera

Kimberton, Pa., *Mar 4<sup>th</sup>* 1896

*Miss Amy Shuder*

Bought of **JOHN FRANCIS,**

--- Dealer In ---

:-: Coal, = Fed, = Lime, = &c. :-:

Put up in 12 1-2 and 25 lb Bg Terms:.....

Fig. 82 Letterhead for John Francis's feed store in Kimberton, 1896.  
 •Note the advertisement for commercially processed poultry food. Farmers were no longer dependent on their own crops for livestock feed. "Improved" products which could increase productivity and cure disease became more attractive to local farmers than the home-grown variety.  
 Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

**BARGAINS IN GROCERIES**

**David Opperman,**

**Near Anselma, Pa.**

Granulated Sugar, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ lb.  
 Best Vanilla Syrup, 30¢ gal.  
 Nice Fat Mackerel, 5¢ each.  
 Best Hightlight Oil, 7¢ gal.  
 Splendid Flour, 4¢ quarter.

**WHAT 25¢ WILL BUY.**

- |                       |     |                     |     |
|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|
| 5 lbs good rice,      | 25¢ | 5 cakes best Oleine | 25¢ |
| 1 lb large rice,      | 25¢ | soap,               | 25¢ |
| 4 lbs coffee cakes,   | 25¢ | 5 lbs fine raisins, | 25¢ |
| 4 lbs soda bicarb,    | 25¢ | 5 lbs lump starch,  | 25¢ |
| 4 lbs water crackers, | 25¢ | 7 lbs rolled oats,  | 25¢ |
| 2 lbs best cheese,    | 25¢ | 5 lbs corn starch,  | 25¢ |
| 1 cans good corn,     | 25¢ | 2 buckets,          | 25¢ |
| 1 cans tomatoes,      | 25¢ | 5 dozens pickles,   | 25¢ |
| 3 quarts lima beans,  | 25¢ | 1 lb Rio coffee,    | 25¢ |
| 6 cakes Perfect       | 25¢ | 5 lbs tapioca,      | 25¢ |
| soap,                 | 25¢ | 2 good brooms,      | 25¢ |
| 6 cakes Quaker        | 25¢ | 5 cans salmon,      | 25¢ |
| City soap,            | 25¢ | 1 box Gold Dust,    | 25¢ |

Give our Flour a trial. Only 45¢ quarter, or \$3.45 barrel.

Our Syrup for 30¢ gal. is without an equal. Try it.

Have you tried Cream Yeast Biscuits?

3 lbs 25¢.

Hams and Dried Beef.

Best Linseed Oil, 45¢ gal.

Get our price on a bale of best Manila

Binder Twine. *W. C. Gardner, PA.*

**DAVID OPPERMAN**

**ANSELMA P. O.**

Fig. 83 Advertisement for goods sold at David Opperman's Store, 1894.  
 •Note the spectrum of processed foods available to Pickering Valley residents at this time, all of which were made easily accessible by railroad transport.  
*The West Chester Daily Republican*, 2 July 1894, Newspaper Clippings File, West Pikeland - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



canned salmon and cakes of Quaker City Soap.<sup>99</sup> Stores added vigor to the streetscape and became nodes of activity where people came to transact a variety of business. In the 1880's and 1890's, the Stiteler Store helped Byers attain the distinction of being "a lively place for farmer's trade and supplies."<sup>100</sup> There were two stores which were connected by telephone in the mid-1890's, one of which stocked coal and lumber and the other "dry goods, fancy and staple groceries, notions, clothing, and everything to be found in a first class establishment."<sup>101</sup> The concentration of ready cash found in these stores and the railroad ticket and post offices that often adjoined them, brought an increased incidence of theft. The Oberholtzers' store and the ticket office in Cambria were broken into repeatedly over the years.<sup>102</sup> Cash and postage stamps were the primary targets, but portable items like cigars and knives were attractive as well. In one case, blasting powder was used on a safe by inexperienced robbers, setting fire to its contents in the process.<sup>103</sup>

Companies like Fred Sheeder's binder board manufactory depended on the line to receive necessary supplies and to ship his finished products. The same held true for Snyder, Root & Company's window frame and sash operation. During the 1940's, the railroad line continued to be used to ship pigs to the meat packing plant in Kimberton.<sup>104</sup> Railroad connections also enabled residents like Opperman to operate sidelight businesses producing a variety of luxury items. His included a cigar manufactory and a greenhouse for raising flowers and winter vegetables.<sup>105</sup> Small factories and shops opened and provided new job opportunities: James Ogden's woolen factory making "yarn for the city trade" near Pikeland station, Shoffner's card and printing office near Cambria, the phosphate manufacturing plant at Chester Springs, E.G. Saul's stocking factory at

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<sup>99</sup> • Diary. J.S. Himes. 16 February 1870 and 30 April 1870, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA. • *West Chester Daily Republican*, 2 July 1894. Opperman's store was torn down in 1959 in order to make way for the relocation of Route 113. • *Coatesville Record*, 16 July 1959.

<sup>100</sup> *The Daily Local*, 4 April 1883.

<sup>101</sup> *The Morning Republican*, 6 July 1895.

<sup>102</sup> *The Daily Local*, 11 March 1875 and 14 April 1881.

<sup>103</sup> *The Daily Local*, 14 April 1881.

<sup>104</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>105</sup> • *The Daily Local*, 22 March 1887. • *The Daily Local*, 22 November 1893.







Rimberton, Pa., Jan 16 1886

Memo

A. M. Sheeder

To SNYDER, ROOT & CO., Dr.

—MANUFACTURERS OF—

**Frames, - Sash, - Shutters, - Blinds,**  
Doors and Mouldings.

Terms :

To- 30ft Pine plank	62	1 92
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Fig. 86 Letterhead for Snyder, Root & Co. Ephemera Collection, East Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

Form 14.

Cambria, Dec 27<sup>1871</sup>  
Mr. Jas. L. Holman

To PHILAD'A & READING RAIL ROAD CO., Dr.

	For Freight on			
Dec. 2 <sup>d</sup>	1 Bx Hats	30		\$ .25
" 4 <sup>th</sup>	Putty & Glues	110		.25
" "	4 Bbls. Oil	1440	15 ¢	2.16
" 6 <sup>th</sup>	1 Case. Molase.		100 ¢	.25
" 7 <sup>th</sup>	1 Bx. Shoes	80		.25
" 9 <sup>th</sup>	1 Stove	150		.25
" 15 <sup>th</sup>	1 Bx Boots			.25
" 26 <sup>th</sup>	Syrup, Candles, Soap & Raisins	1250 lbs.		1.64
" 27 <sup>th</sup>	1 sacko salt	450 lb. 10 ¢		5.30
				.45
				3.75

Rec<sup>d</sup>. Payment  
John Oberholzer  
Agent

Fig. 87 A monthly shipping bill for Holman's store in Cambria, 1871. Note that shipments came erratically depending on local need. All types of merchandise were shipped, from stoves to raisins. Ephemera Collection, West Pikeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.





Byers and the Mullin's tin and stove company.<sup>106</sup> These operations were extensions of the earlier water powered mills, which had dotted the valley a few generations back, only now the power they employed was steam rather than water. The railroad opened up new prospects, provided greater access to luxury goods, and raised expectations for a higher standard of living. Wives no longer had to make soap, they could buy it. Later in the century, Kimberton had a bakery which delivered bread to families choosing not to make their own - 25¢ for 6 loaves.<sup>107</sup> The imposed self-sufficiency of prior generations began to crumble as basic items such as feed, seed, and baled hay sold in stores, like that of Mr. Moses in Anselma, became practical purchases. It became cheaper to purchase these items rather than expend the time and effort necessary to harvest them. The nature of agriculture was changing as quickly as the locales in which it was being practiced.

Farm goods were not the only natural resources shipped out of the valley. In the early years of the railroad, large quantities of wood were being shipped out as well. Some of it was later used in the production of telegraph poles, some went to regional paper companies, and some was made into lumber.<sup>108</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent to which logging was practiced here, or the degree to which it affected the surrounding landscape, since there are only a few references to it after the mid 1870's. The land was highly cultivated at this time, and there was probably a limited number of stands of mature trees available for harvest. It is likely therefore that it was a short-lived enterprise. Rail access encouraged companies to develop resources that had previously remained untapped due to the high-cost of transportation by wagon teams. The Knickerbocker Stone Company made plans to purchase land in West Pikeland and establish a quarry there.<sup>109</sup> Their intent was to lay a branch line from the quarry to the Pickering Valley Railroad which could be used to convey the enormous granite blocks that weighed from

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<sup>106</sup> • *The Jeffersonian*, 7 September 1872. • *The Daily Local*, 3 April 1883. • *The Daily Local*, 25 February 1884. • *The Daily Local*, 28 May 1887. • *The Daily Local*, 4 June 1875.

<sup>107</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 5 December 1969.

<sup>108</sup> *The Daily Local*, 2 May 1873 and 24 July 1874.

<sup>109</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 17 February 1872.



ten to thirty tons each. Another company set up a granite quarry near Chester Springs in 1876 and planned to use the stone for building purposes and "Belgian pavement."<sup>110</sup>

### Mining

The industry that had the greatest effect on the character of this agricultural landscape was not logging or quarrying, but mining. It was long recognized that this region, especially in the townships of West Pikeland and Upper Uwchlan, possessed rich mineral resources. Estelle Cremers has documented nine iron mines that were in operation in West Pikeland township between the 1850's and the 1880's.<sup>111</sup> Many farmers leased their lands to mining concerns, the most prominent of which included the Phoenix and Monocacy Iron Companies. The Phoenix Iron Company needed all the ore they could get in order to fill their orders. The year after the Pickering Valley line opened, the company was in the midst of building another massive mill. It was said that "when the present mill, now being erected by the Phoenix Iron Company, is completed, they will have the largest works and will employ more hands than any mill now in existence, not excepting the celebrated Krupp's iron works of Germany."<sup>112</sup> Other farmers chose to dabble in the occupation on their own or hire individuals to prospect for them: "Dr. Morris Fussel is digging for iron ore on his place. Mr. Richard Denithorne is doing the work. There seems to be quite an excitement on the iron ore question in that locality."<sup>113</sup>

Each new excavation seemed to uncover a deposit of iron so extensive and so pure that fortunes were guaranteed, but just as quickly the excitement would dissipate. No fortunes were made in the Pickering Valley despite the thousands of tons of soil taken from the hills and valleys. Men were fickle when it came to mining. Mines were constantly being given up, closed, and reopened. At that point, all of the water that had collected from rain and the subterranean streams, in addition to unknown quantities of

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<sup>110</sup> *The Daily Local*, 19 January 1876.

<sup>111</sup> Estelle Cremers, *30,000 Acres: Vincent and Pikeland Townships 1686-1850* (Limerick, PA: Holcomb Studios, 1989), 88.

<sup>112</sup> *Phoenixville Messenger*, 30 November 1872.

<sup>113</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 January 1880.



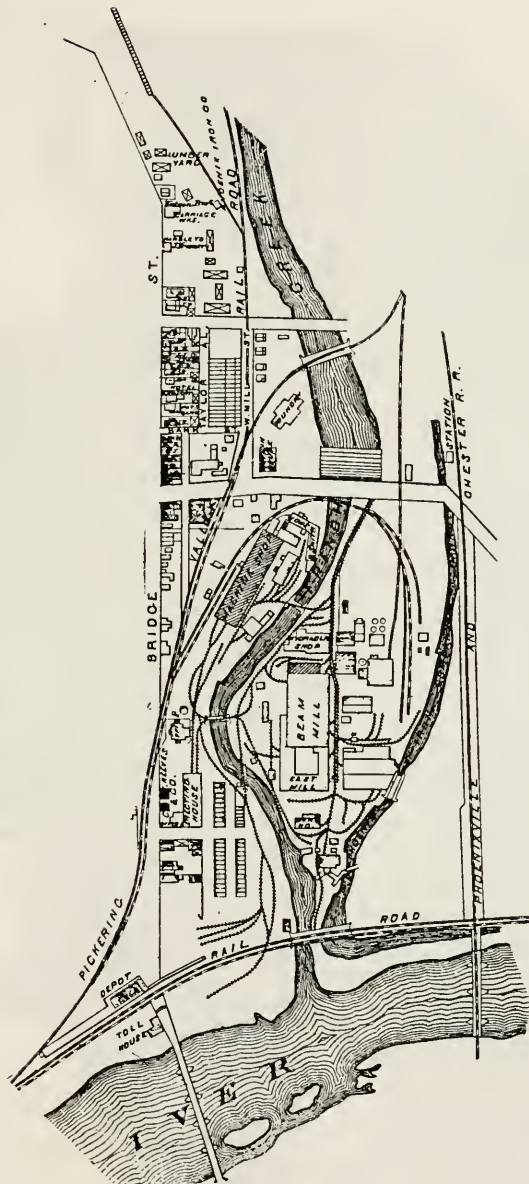


Fig. 88 Map showing the configuration of the Phoenix Iron Works on the French Creek, 1873.  
 •Note the degree to which the manufacturing plants were connected to the rail lines.  
 A.R. Witmer, *Atlas of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Safe Harbor, PA: Witmer Inc., 1873).





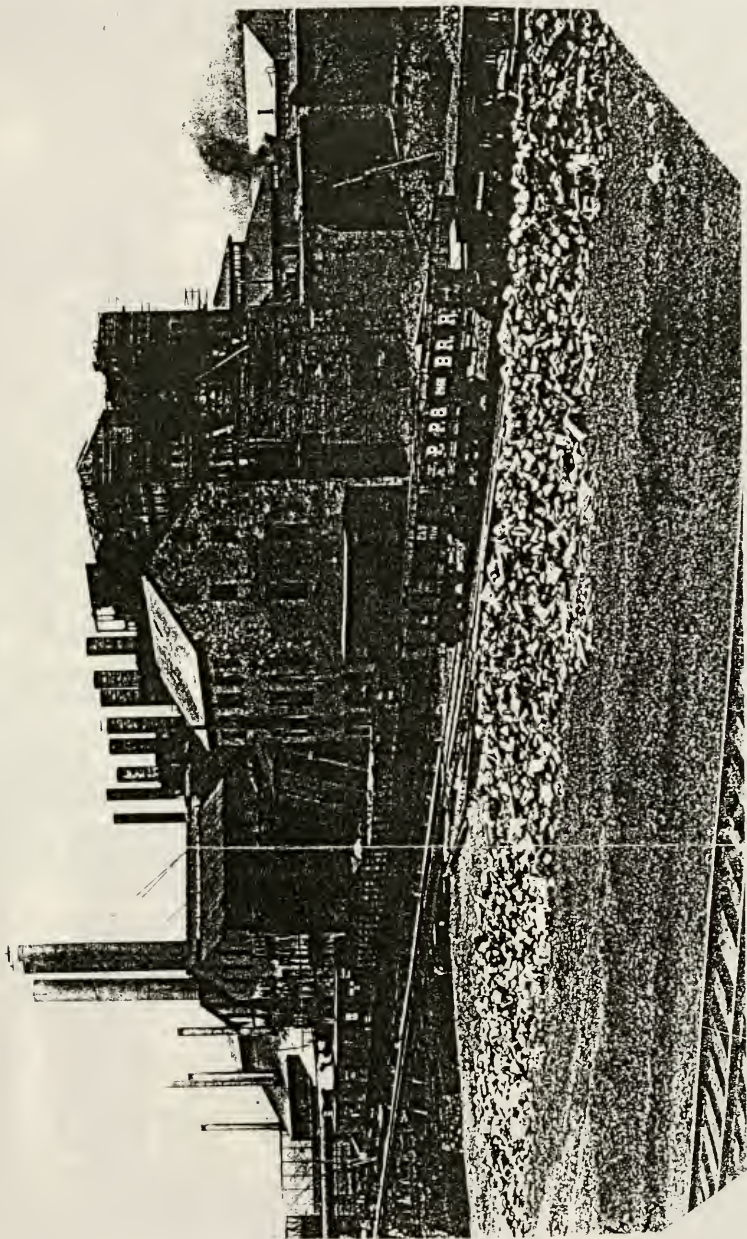
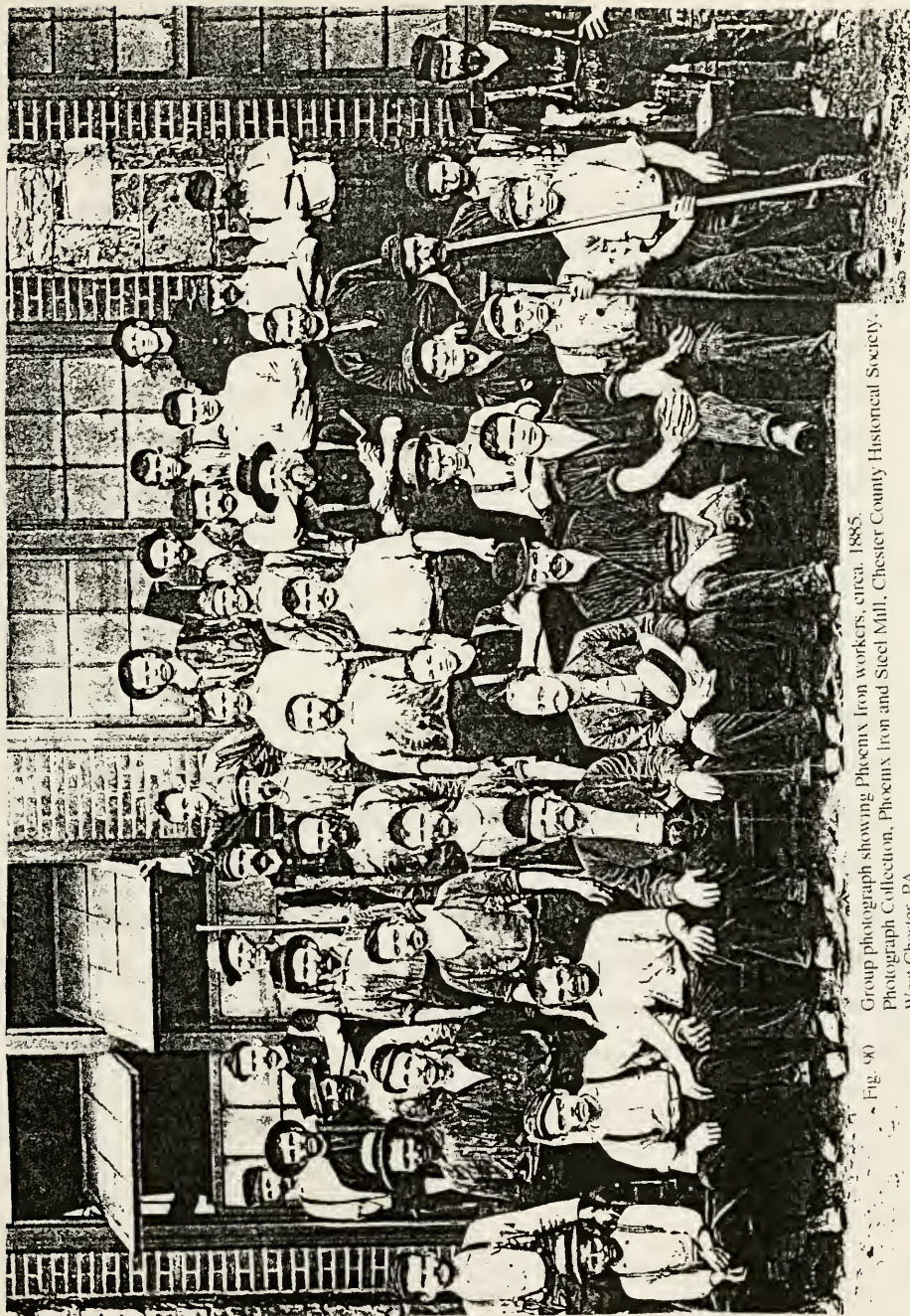


Fig. 89  
Phoenix Iron Works, no date given.  
Photograph Collection, Phoenix Iron and Steel Mill, Chester County Historical  
Society, West Chester, PA.







Group photograph showing Phocmy Iron workers, circa. 1885.  
Photograph Collection, Phocmy Iron and Steel Mill, Chester County Historical Society,  
West Chester, PA.

Fig. 90



aquatic life, would have to be pumped out of the open excavation pits.<sup>114</sup> Work was intermittent. A large number of employees were discharged once the railroad opened up access to the area and rendered the traditional ore teams obsolete.<sup>115</sup> Horses and mules continued to have a place in mining operations, because smaller teams were still needed to haul carts of ore to the railroad platforms.<sup>116</sup> Imagine the impact of those mines upon the land. They are shown as dark black circles on county atlases, though their effects surely spread much farther than those clearly delineated boundaries. Think of the heavy carts loaded with ore bouncing along deeply rutted, often muddy roads, winding past villages towards the ore platforms at the railroad station. Imagine the engines tucked away in their engine houses, constantly pumping murky water from the bottom of the open pits and shafts and the ceaseless drone of mechanization. Picture the dark water churning up from below, being siphoned into makeshift drifts, which were funneled into any available stream and the gaping open holes, from which the ore was constantly removed.

Iron was not the only mineral sought. There were other companies that extracted copper and some lead, but never to the same degree as iron mining.<sup>117</sup> Only graphite mining managed to supersede it. Graphite was said to have been discovered in Upper Uwchlan township around 1866, when two farmers noticed an oily substance on the water of a pond and had it analyzed.<sup>118</sup> There did not appear to be too much interest in developing the resource, however, until the mid-1870's. John Todd of Byers, seems to be the person who launched the graphite frenzy. Graphite deposits were located on his land in April 1875 and "as a result of the discovery, new houses are rapidly going up in the

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<sup>114</sup> *The Daily Local*, 8 April 1882.

<sup>115</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 1 April 1871.

<sup>116</sup> *The Daily Local*, 24 September 1881.

<sup>117</sup> • *West Chester Local News*, 20 July 1874. • *The Daily Local*, 7 March 1901.

<sup>118</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 14 October 1936.



ELECTROTYPING,  
PENCIL STOCK,  
Lubricator, Powder Polish,  
Store Polish,  
ALL GRADES OF GRAPHITE.

EAGLE  
Plumbago Company.

Uwchlan P. O., Chester Co., Pa. June 11 1877

Mr Hoyle  
Sir

Mr. Burgess desires me to  
write to you - If you will be home on  
Wednesday next June 13 1877 If you  
are home Mr J Beerbower myself will be  
over to see you about some writings Mr  
J B Burgess inform you about Please  
answer by mail as can get it by the  
West Chester Mail Tuesday

I believe you to  
Yours truly,

Wm Lloyd P. Chester  
Pa

Fig. 91 Letterhead from the Eagle Plumbago Company, 1877.  
•Note the varied uses of plumbago / graphite mentioned in the upper left corner.  
Ephemera Collection, Upper Uwchlan Township - Business Houses, Chester County  
Historical Society, West Chester, PA.





village of Byers, and the villagers are awakening to the fact the town is really worth something after all."<sup>119</sup>

Graphite, also known as plumbago, was considered a rather exotic mineral at the time. Its chemical makeup is almost pure carbon. It has been used in the production of pencils for hundreds of years in Germany and England, where deposits of graphite were once very extensive. Its industrial applications, however, were valued even more highly. Due to its chemical makeup, graphite remains very stable under high temperatures, making it an attractive material for foundry materials like crucibles and face plates. Its ability to greatly decrease friction between moving parts when added to oil made it a highly prized commodity during the industrialized era of the late nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century.<sup>120</sup>

Before the discovery of graphite in the Chester / Berks county area, most of the country's supply had been imported from Ceylon and Mexico. Pennsylvania and Alabama had this country's only known deposits of graphite. The discovery of this relatively rare resource in the Pickering Valley area gave a great boost to the local economy as well raising the community's self confidence. This discovery was the most significant local event since the opening of the railroad. The ore platforms were once again be full, but this time with a new commodity, graphite instead of iron. Surveyors descended in swarms on local farms, taking samples and negotiating leases and mineral rights. Other tracts of land were sold outright. Large numbers of mining companies set up shop in the midst of pastures, eager to uncover this new treasure. Unfortunately, most of these companies did not realize the intricacies involved in extracting and processing graphite. Even thirty years later, in 1909, government mineralogists felt that:

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<sup>119</sup> *The Daily Local*, 17 April 1875.

<sup>120</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 812-13.







**GRAPHITE GNEISS AREAS OF PHOENIXVILLE QUADRANGLE,  
 CHESTER COUNTY, SHOWING LOCATION OF GRAPHITE MINES.**

Fig. 92 Map of known graphite deposits in the Pickering Valley area in 1912.  
 •Note the fact that there were twelve graphite mining and processing operations in this small area during the last quarter of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries.

Benjamin Miller, *Topographic and Geologic Survey of Pennsylvania Report #6: Graphite Deposits of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: C.E. Augenbaugh, PA State Printer, 1912), plate 1.

**NOTE:** The outlines of the Graphite (Pickering) Gneiss have been taken mainly from a manuscript geologic map prepared by F. Bascom. Small areas of Franklin Limestone, Baltimore Gneiss, and dikes of Gabbros, Serpentines, and Diabase are not represented.



The natural-graphite industry of the United States, although of constantly growing importance, must be regarded, with a few notable exceptions, as in an experimental stage. The production is sporadic and of uneven grade, and, as a consequence, no steady markets have been built up..... The cause of the unstable condition of the graphite industry in this country is found in the facts that the largest domestic deposits are schists which carry small flakes of graphite disseminated through them, and that the separation of the graphite from the accompanying minerals is a problem of unusual difficulty.<sup>121</sup>

In the opinion of experts in the field, it was believed that past operations were based on blind hope and large amounts of invested capital, but in the end they were doomed to failure, because methods of ore dressing had not been refined to the degree necessary to make a profit: "In general the cost of producing flake graphite is so high, and the prices at which it was sold so low, that even under the most economic conditions, the margin of profit is small."<sup>122</sup> This of course is looking back on the situation with the benefit of several decades of hindsight. At the time, residents of the western end of the Pickering Valley Railroad line saw a promising future in plumbago, and their attempts to fulfill this hope would bring another dramatic change to the land.

Many of the mines were professionally run operations owned by outside investors. It seems that there were numerous investors from Reading, PA.<sup>123</sup> These larger mines often employed twenty to thirty men. Some local residents worked in the mines, but many supervisors were brought in from the outside, and one company even imported 30 miners from England who had previous experience working in the Cumberland Mines.<sup>124</sup> The amount of work available varied greatly depending on the short-term prospects of the mine. One month shifts would operate around the clock, and local farmers would have difficulty bringing in their crops due to the fact that all extra hands

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<sup>121</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 809-10.

<sup>122</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 810.

<sup>123</sup> *The Coatesville Weekly Times*, 22 November 1890.

<sup>124</sup> *The Coatesville Weekly Times*, 22 November 1890.



were busy at the mines.<sup>125</sup> The next month an entire mine would be shut down indefinitely, while the directors tried to determine if there was any way to make a profit on their operation. Many of the mining company's went into substantial debt and were unable to pay their creditors or their employees' back wages. In 1908, workers threatened to dynamite the Continental Graphite Company's mill if their wages were not paid. Fortunately, nothing actually became of the threat, and the conflict was resolved.<sup>126</sup>

These recessions put a damper on the community's spirits, because with that many people out of work, the stores and trades that depended on their patronage would be hard hit as well.<sup>127</sup> Growth had been fueled in Byers, Chester Springs, and Kimberton by the graphite mines, and as a result, the economies of these communities were tied to the health of the industry. When it was a good year for the mining companies, prospects looked up, and when prospects were poor, tenant houses emptied and commercial revenues dropped.<sup>128</sup> Individual residents who endeavored to mine their own land faced similar problems. Joseph Hartman, owner of a wagonworks, was caught up in the mining fever and converted the building into a mill for processing graphite ore. Two years later he decided the business "was not a congenial one to him" and reverted to his previous craftsman status, setting up a shop for the manufacture of rifles stocks from local black walnut trees.<sup>129</sup>

It is important to understand the influence that mining had on the western end of the Pickering Valley Railroad line. Many farmers had leased acreage to the graphite mining companies, and companies often controlled an extensive network of leases which spread across numerous farms. In 1906, the Pennsylvania Graphite Company's operations spread over 1,000 acres in Upper Uwchlan and West Pikeland townships.<sup>130</sup> This mania

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<sup>125</sup> *The Daily Local*, 29 July 1881.

<sup>126</sup> *The Daily Local*, 11 March 1908, 9 April 1908.

<sup>127</sup> *The Daily Local*, 2 January 1886.

<sup>128</sup> *The Daily Local*, 10 April 1895.

<sup>129</sup> *The Daily Local*, 22 May 1880, 21 March 1882.

<sup>130</sup> *The Daily Local*, 1 June 1906.





over graphite altered the community's attitudes towards property rights over the years. Boundaries that had never been extremely important when the primary activity was agriculture, suddenly gained increasing attention as each property owner sought to safeguard his investment:

In the old days when farm land was of little value and the residents of the neighborhood lived together in peace and good fellowship, not much attention was paid to border lines and rights of way, and the principle of give and take was practiced in harmonious fashion.

In these recent times, however, since the coming of so many graphite companies and the prospect of greatly increased valuation, more attention is being paid to the business interests of the community and owners are looking more carefully after their possessions.<sup>131</sup>

As companies vied to claim as much land as possible, private roads once shared by local farmers had their access restricted. Relationships among neighbors meant little, because the ties of long-term friendships had been severed, and long-term commitments to the land which had guided the agricultural development of the area were exchanged for short-term returns.

The graphite industry in this area not only extracted the ore, as was the case with the iron mines, but did processing on site as well: "The Pennsylvania Graphite Works, at Byers Station on the Pickering Valley Railroad, are running full handed and are not only mining the plumbago in large quantities, but are doing an extensive business in manufacturing it for market."<sup>132</sup> The London Hill Mine and Manufacturing Company of Mosesville (also known as Pikeland and McKinleyville) even produced a graphite-based paint using locally processed graphite and red chrome which they secured from a quarry in East Pikeland. The paint was marketed as a protective coating for iron components.<sup>133</sup>

The ore was first extracted from shafts, also called drifts, that were driven into the hillside parallel to the mineral deposits, or else simply scooped up from open pits.

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<sup>131</sup> *The Daily Local*, 26 June 1906.

<sup>132</sup> *The Daily Local*, 10 November 1877.

<sup>133</sup> *The Daily Local*, 31 July 1886.





Extraction of the ore in the West Pikeland / Upper Uwchlan area was quite easy, because the rock in which it was located was disintegrated, and the ore could be removed with a pick and shovel without aid of blasting powder.<sup>134</sup> This type of ore was classified as "soft ore," and soil analysts felt that the disintegrated character of the rock was caused by "the action of surface waters."<sup>135</sup> As was mentioned in the previous chapter, water in the form of creeks and underground streams had always been considered a benefit to the farming community and early industry. The mining companies, however, felt no such appreciation for these water sources, since they tended to fill the mines with water and make excavation nearly impossible.<sup>136</sup> Many different types of pumps were employed to try and address this problem, but it proved to be a constant vexation, since the engines needed to run the pumps had to be constantly maintained and serviced.

Once loosened, the ore was pulled up the shaft in mine cars with a cable device and then transported to the processing mill via a "tramway."<sup>137</sup> The ore was pulverized by a machine called a jaw crusher, transferred to crushing rollers, washed, dried in a rotary drier, separated into various grades using different sizes of wire mesh, and then ground to a fine powder using French burr-millstones.<sup>138</sup> The milling process had definite environmental consequences and, despite the area's economic dependence on this industry, concerns were raised about the effects of toxic runoff. In March of 1906, J.W. Criswell, the local fish warden, brought suit against the Philadelphia Graphite Company charging that their mill was not "using proper care in emptying its refuse." Instead of diverting waste water into holding ponds where pollutants could settle, it was being shunted into the nearby Pickering Creek where killed "hundreds of fish and

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<sup>134</sup> Joseph Struthers, ed., "Graphite" in *The Mineral Industry*, vol. X (New York: Scientific Publishing Company, 1903), 367.

<sup>135</sup> <sup>135</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 827.

<sup>136</sup> *The Daily Local*, 1 March 1887.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Rothwell, ed., "Graphite" in *The Mineral Industry*, vol. VII (New York: Scientific Publishing Company, 1899), 383.

<sup>138</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 825.





Fig. 93 Strip mining trenches near Byers.  
Benjamin Miller, *Topographic and Geologic Survey of Pennsylvania Report #6: Graphite Deposits of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: C.E. Augenbaugh, PA State Printer, 1912), plate XI.

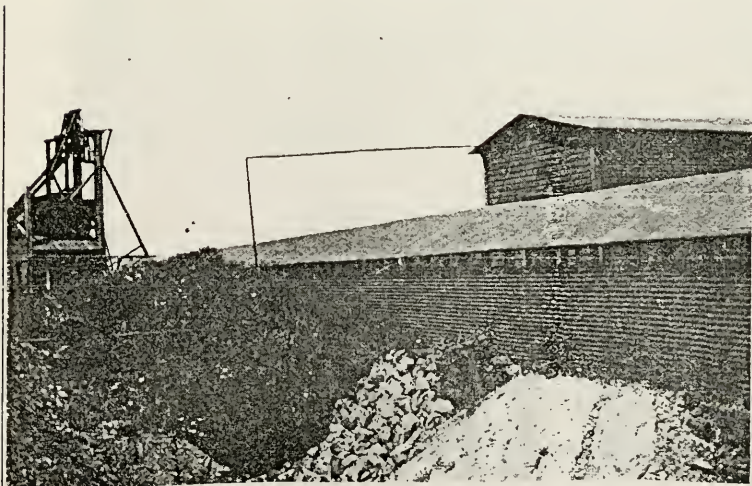


Fig. 94 Tramway used to transport graphite ore.  
Benjamin Miller, *Topographic and Geologic Survey of Pennsylvania Report #6: Graphite Deposits of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: C.E. Augenbaugh, PA State Printer, 1912), plate XIV.





Fig. 96 View inside the mine shaft.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 95 Abandoned graphitic mine shaft on Bayers Road.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.





thousands of fish spawn."<sup>139</sup> The judge decided in favor of the plaintiff and levied a \$50 fine on the company. It is significant that at this early stage, the community was aware of the potential damage that industry could bring if not properly supervised, and residents acted on their beliefs by supporting Warden Criswell's suit.

As was mentioned previously, the major problem with graphite mining was separating the mineral from its rocky matrix. Depending on the purity of the deposit, only 3% to 15% of the ore extracted would be graphite. Between ten and thirty tons of soil were needed to produce one ton of graphite.<sup>140</sup> In 1899, one ton of the mineral would bring between \$75 and \$150 depending on its quality.<sup>141</sup> The amount of earth removed from pastures around Byers and Chester Springs must have been phenomenal, considering the fact that there were nine mining operations operating within a ten mile radius in 1909. These operations were in addition to the multitude of abandoned mines that had been dug in the area during the previous three decades. A description of the Pennsylvania Graphite Company's excavations provides some idea of the impact these mines had on the land around them. The site contained underground workings composed of a shaft extending downward to a depth of 154 feet from which several drifts branched. The drifts extended 800-900 feet into the hillside from the shaft, although access to some of the drifts were blocked, because of cave-ins. In addition, there were several open pits ranging from 15 to 50 feet in depth and measuring 100 feet by 400 feet.<sup>142</sup> The countryside became pockmarked with these shafts and pits. Some eventually filled with water and created impromptu ponds, many of the shafts caved in, and those that remained open were used as depositories for local garbage well into this century.

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<sup>139</sup> *The Daily Local*, 22 March 1906.

<sup>140</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 827, 830.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Rothwell, ed., "Graphite" in *The Mineral Industry*, vol. VII (New York: Scientific Publishing Company, 1899), 383.

<sup>142</sup> Edson S. Bastin, "Graphite," *Mineral Resources of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 825.





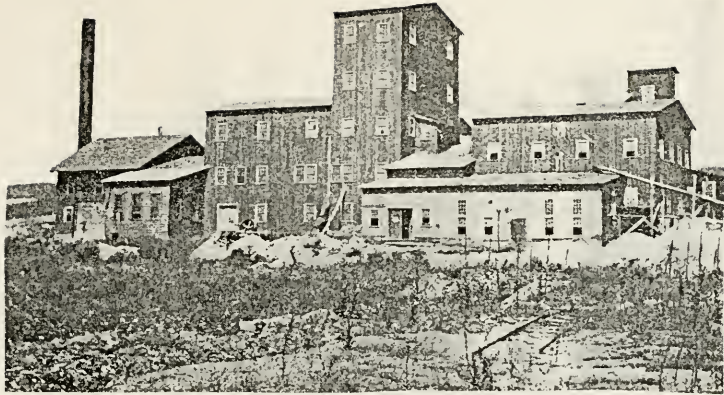
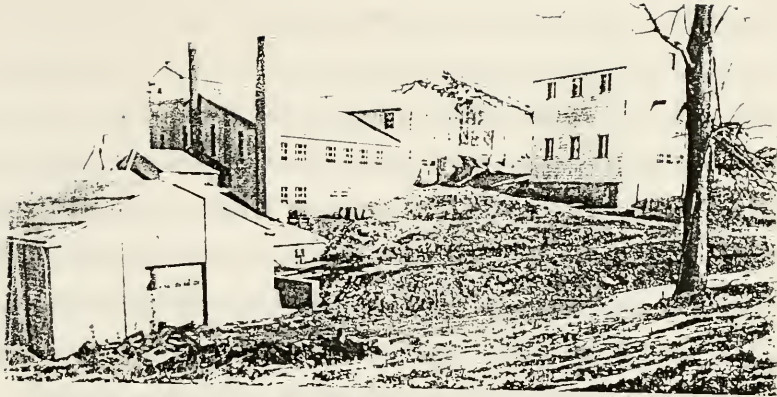


Fig. 97 View of the Acme Graphite Company processing mill near Byers.  
 •Note the barrenness of the surrounding landscape.  
 Benjamin Miller, *Topographic and Geologic Survey of Pennsylvania Report #6: Graphite Deposits of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: C.E. Augenbaugh, PA State Printer, 1912), plate XIV.



Fig. 98 View of another graphite mill near Byers.  
 •Note the large scale, frame construction. It did not survive long after the mills were closed. In many cases the lumber was salvaged, and the plants slowly disappeared into the surrounding fields.  
 Benjamin Miller, *Topographic and Geologic Survey of Pennsylvania Report #6: Graphite Deposits of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: C.E. Augenbaugh, PA State Printer, 1912), plate XI.





VIEW LOOKING NORTH SHOWING MILL BUILDING AND ROLLS HOUSE

# ORE REDUCTION PLANT

— GRAPHITE BEARING ORE —

**CHESTER SPRINGS,  
PENNSYLVANIA.**

PLANCOR 1254

JAW CRUSHER CONVEYORS TO ROLL HOUSE

PLANCOR 1254  
WEST CHESTER, PA. 19380

*In Chester County Historical Society  
June 17-47 - Home of Walker for*

A PROPERTY OF  
DEFENSE PLANT  
CORPORATION

A SUBSIDIARY OF  
RECONSTRUCTION  
FINANCE  
CORPORATION



Fig. 99 Revived Cold War era graphite plant in Chester Springs.

• The shape of the plants is similar to those of fifty years earlier, only the construction material was concrete block, not wood.

Ephemera Collection, West Pkeland Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



The mill structures eventually came down as well. In some instances they met a fiery demise. Others were converted to fulfill new manufacturing functions. One mill in Byers later housed a wood-working company that made ironing boards, card tables, and rolling pins during the twenties, but it too was eventually torn down.<sup>143</sup> The first mills were immense frame structures, simply constructed with large open areas, which housed the machinery used in processing. Photographs from the early 1900's show them hunched down in a morass of mud or dirt depending on the weather. There were no trees to soften their profiles. They became visual representations of the mining industry, because the mines themselves had no form, since they were below grade and hidden.

Even today one can drive along the roads looking out over the fields trying to find indications of their presence but, without the mills acting as sentries, the mines are practically invisible. In some cases the mines have collapsed and filled with water creating innocuous ponds. Nature can be forgiving, and seventy years of growth has covered most of the traces that mining ever had a role in this community. Some long-time residents, however, are still wary of certain sections of the township where mining took place. Sarah Walton and Lucie Windolph remember that as children they were forbidden to go into certain areas by their parents, lest they fall into one of the abandoned mines, and several decades ago a farmer was killed when his tractor tire caught the edge of a former mill shaft. Both man and machine fell headlong into the pit near the Horseshoe trail above Route 113 in Chester Springs.<sup>144</sup>

The industry struggled through several revivals, though none of them were successful. The industrial need for graphite during periods of war increased the demand: first during the Spanish-American War in 1898, then during World War I, again during World War II, and finally during the Cold War. Each time local residents tried to convince the government that the industry could not make a profit, but the government's

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<sup>143</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 11 November 1941.

<sup>144</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.





interest was not in making money. The government wanted to insure that, if their graphite supplies from Madagascar and Ceylon were cut off, this mineral could still be obtained domestically. Graphite was necessary for crucibles used in the production of bombs and in the lubrication of all manners of war machines.<sup>145</sup> The Federal Government spent \$400,000 building a new mill near Chester Springs which was administered by the Benjamin Franklin Graphite Company. It racked up enormous debts, and produced very little graphite.<sup>146</sup> The property reverted back to the Defense Plant Corporation and was closed as a surplus war industry. It was remodeled in the early 1950's for anticipated reuse. At that time, the project was considered "a cold war baby."

### Confidence, Growth, and a Changing Townscape

The week that the Pickering Valley Railroad opened, a writer for *The Jeffersonian* charged that it was ridiculous to name a train stop after a town that was located two or three miles away.<sup>147</sup> Evidently this person had little foresight concerning the development the rail line would bring to the villages along this route. Stations equipped for handling freight required a large amount of empty land on which the sidings, depots, platforms and other support structures could be constructed. Therefore, when the final survey for the route was made, the stations were located, not in the center of existing villages where their room for expansion would be limited, but on the outskirts of town where the noise, smoke, and bustle would not cause an undue disturbance. As time passed, the towns gradually expanded towards their respective stations and slowly increased their boundaries. This was the case with both Kimberton and Chester Springs.

Byers, the other major freight station, was a different story. It was established less than a mile away from the eighteenth century town of Eagle, but once the name of the station was chosen (Byers rather than Eagle) its destiny was forever changed. It would evolve as an autonomous town with a separate identity. Byers and Eagle quickly

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<sup>145</sup> • *The Evening Bulletin*, 19 April 1943. • *The Daily Republican*, 4 April 1943.

<sup>146</sup> *The Downingtown Archive*, 7 August 1952.

<sup>147</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 30 September 1871.

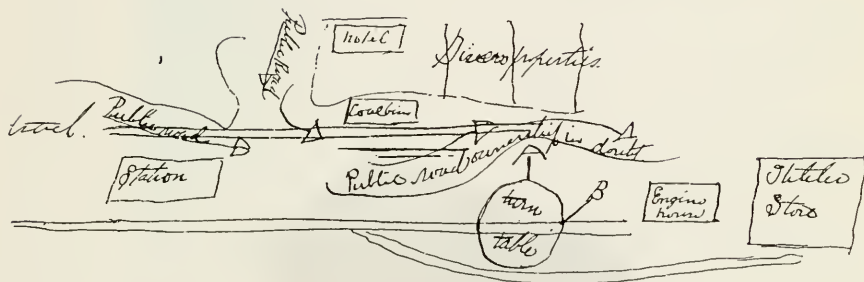




## Wachtel & Riddle

Manufacturing Chemists

BYERS, PA., ..... 189



*The portions marked (Public road) are in dark. Very dangerous particularly when as frequently is the case the is left with steel in position A.*

Fig. 100 Hand-sketch map of the area near the railroad station in Byers.

- Note the way in which roads, stores and residences are clustered around the terminus of the railroad line. In this case the configuration has caused a local traffic problem, because, as Dr. Wachtel points out in his letter, the turntable gate blocks off the road and presents a dangerous situation for travellers after dark. Letter, Dr. Wachtel to The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Manuscript Division, Wilmington, DE.



# A Grand Entertainment,

At MT. PICKERING HALL, Byers, Pa.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 1895.

ADMISSION, 25 CENTS.

- Fig. 101 Ticket to an event at Mount Pickering Hall in Byers
- Local halls like this one were social centers for village residents.
- Ephemera File, Upper Uwchlan Township - Business Houses, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA



Fig. 102 The Masonic Lodge, Mount Pickering Hall, on Byers Road.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



developed a sometimes-heated rivalry. New businesses wanted to be near the train station for practical reasons. The Stiteler store needed to be near the platforms for the quickest transport of their lumber shipments. A butcher stand advertised for rent in 1875 offered " a No. 1 slaughter house with good stabling and shedding for wagons. Within 200 yards of the railroad station, which will make it an excellent stand from which to attend Philadelphia Markets."<sup>148</sup> When the local chapter of Masons saw the final rail survey, they wanted to relocate their lodge.<sup>149</sup> Mount Pickering Hall was built in Eagle, but by 1895 it was decided to move the structure to the more prestigious location of Byers.<sup>150</sup> A plank walkway was later constructed which bridged the two towns, and allowed pedestrians to travel between them without becoming entrenched in the mud.<sup>151</sup> This link enabled Eagle to reap some benefits from Byers success. Eventually Eagle became home to several stores, butcher shops, oyster restaurants, and even two ice cream saloons, but the underlying rivalry remained.<sup>152</sup> The longest running feud was over control of the post office, a gathering place for the entire community and a symbol of governmental power.<sup>153</sup> It was transferred back and forth over the years, until the office was closed several decades ago. Even today, though they are separated by less than a few blocks, this separation is still recognized.

Byers was the only new town created by the railroad, though the line did raise the vitality and secure the future of tiny settlements like Pikeland and Anselma. For other villages, the railroad provided a path to a new future, but to Byers it gave life. The village was possessed of enormous amounts of self-confidence during this era:

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<sup>148</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 February 1875.

<sup>149</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 28 May 1870, and Letter, J. Benner Evans et. al. to The R.W. Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania, 24 June 1869, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>150</sup> *The Daily Local*, 14 August 1895.

<sup>151</sup> Letter, Beerbower to Wooten, 1 November 1874, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1005, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>152</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 13 July 1872, *The Daily Local*, 14 November 1873.

<sup>153</sup> Letter, I. Weaver, 13 March 1875, Newspaper Clipping File for Uwchlan P.O., Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.



Byerstown is still increasing and is now a place of some importance, the fine rows of houses and the spires of coal chutes are luminous signs of places of immense magnitude, and we shall look forward to see some grand achievements there.<sup>154</sup>

Six months later, residents were so impressed by "the noise and din caused by workmen" and "the joyful sound of saw and hatchet" which reverberated through the hills, that they seriously discussed amongst themselves, the possibility of one day becoming the county seat.<sup>155</sup>

In the months prior to the opening of the line, a considerable amount of property was said to have changed hands.<sup>156</sup> John Todd, a member of the Pickering Valley Railroad Company's board who had made a substantial amount of money in the cattle business, began collecting acreage around Byers station (the town was actually called Toddyville for a short time). Todd had plans to develop the land with small business stands and tenant houses with the intent of renting them. The discovery of graphite deposits on his land helped spur this development: "Improvement - Mr. John Todd will erect two more houses at Byers station soon, to accommodate those working at the Plumbago mines nearby."<sup>157</sup> The endeavor must have been profitable initially, because the local papers lauded his character during the Christmas season of 1876 when he presented each of his tenant families with a turkey, and in 1886 he planned to establish a bank for the town, which was to be located in his house.<sup>158</sup> Other land owners like Joseph Butler were also dividing their farms up into smaller building lots fronting on Byers Road.<sup>159</sup> For several years, local carpenters and plasterers were kept busy completing new homes and raising a town. Byers is an excellent example, repeated over and over during the nineteenth century, of how entrepreneurial spirit reshaped the American scene.

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<sup>154</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 14 September 1872.

<sup>155</sup> *The Daily Local*, 2 May 1873.

<sup>156</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 18 February 1871.

<sup>157</sup> *The Daily Local*, 4 June 1875.

<sup>158</sup> *The Daily Local*, 4 January 1876. and *Chester County Times*, 25 August 1886.

<sup>159</sup> *The Daily Local*, 15 August 1876.







Fig. 103 Housing built for mine workers in Byers, PA.  
• Note the blue structure in the center has a pressed tin exterior finish and was once used as the community bank.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 104 Residences around the former Chester Springs Station.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Similar patterns of development occurred in Chester Springs. The railroad attracted enterprising businessmen to the area, and they needed homes for their families. A new type of home was needed, unlike the farm houses built earlier in the century. These houses would not be isolated in the midst of large land holdings. Instead, they would sit conveniently near village amenities like the stores, schools, and community halls. Such was the case with Mr. Shoffner, who opened a card and printing office in Cambria and shortly thereafter commissioned a new house for himself near Chester Springs station. This type of development was looked upon very favorably: "We can see no reason why there should not be many more (houses) built at the same place, as the location is a good one in every respect."<sup>160</sup> As was the case in Byers, there were some large property owners who preferred to divide their farms into building lots rather than pursue the agricultural profession: "Miss Graceanna Lewis, ornithologist of Media, Delaware county, has laid off her farm at Sunnyside, near Chester Springs, into building lots."<sup>161</sup> Other residents chose to hold on to their property, but develop it themselves. Isaac Tustin, a long-time resident, saw a need for housing after the railroad opened and built "a new dwelling house...designed and erected for the accommodation of railroad employees."<sup>162</sup>

The Pickering Valley Railroad fueled Kimberton's growth spurt during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in two distinct ways. As was already mentioned with Byers and Chester Springs, the railroad brought businesses to the community which in turn necessitated the construction of commercial structures and homes for employees. The following quote provides a clear expression of this change from a contemporary newspaper:

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<sup>160</sup> *The Daily Local*, 17 December 1878.

<sup>161</sup> *The Daily Local*, 22 April 1876.

<sup>162</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 11 May 1872.



Kimberton - Probably no little town in the county has grown more in the last ten years than Kimberton. In addition to the store, tavern, mill, blacksmith shop, and the few dwellings of former times, there are now a depot, warehouse, and a dozen or more fine brick houses. This is what a railroad does for a place.<sup>163</sup>

This passage sets up a strong contrast between the old elements of the townscape and the new additions. In Kimberton the early fixtures like the mill and tavern were located on the crest of the hill at the cross roads. The newer elements like the depot and warehouse staked their territory at the bottom of the hill along the train line.

It is also notable that the new residences were characterized both by their quality, "fine," and their material, "brick." The term "brick" appeared over and over again in reference to new construction in the area.<sup>164</sup> Many of these houses were built on lots laid out by an outside real estate speculator named Dutton Madden, who went out of business shortly thereafter. Madden's legacy to the town was this framework of regularly spaced lots which helped shape the future pattern of the east end of town.<sup>165</sup> The brick houses contrast with the community's traditional building type which utilizes local stone and a coating of exterior stucco. The railroad enabled newer, more fashionable, materials like brick to be shipped for a reasonable charge. The National Register historic district nomination form for Kimberton comments on the fact that these two approaches to residential architecture "brick buildings at the eastern end of the district and the local stone construction on the western end" provide a clear illustration of the two phases of the town's growth, preindustrial and industrial.<sup>166</sup>

The second way in which the railroad aided Kimberton's development was to make travel from Phoenixville quick and affordable. Phoenixville's industry was booming during this era. Thousands of people worked in the local iron manufacturing plants, and

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<sup>163</sup> *The Daily Local*, 27 August 1885.

<sup>164</sup> *The Daily Local*, 26 July 1875, and 2 April 1885.

<sup>165</sup> Estelle Cremers, *30,000 Acres: Vincent and Pikeland Townships 1686-1850* (Limerick, PA: Holcomb Studios, 1989), 101.

<sup>166</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "Kimberton Historic District," On file at: The Chester County Office of Parks and Recreation, Westchester, PA.





Fig. 105 The old section of Kimberton village which was established during the first half of the nineteenth century.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 106 The newer section of Kimberton situated down the hill from the old.  
• Its development was shaped by the introduction of the railroad.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.











while many lived in company-owned housing within the city limits, others sought a different lifestyle. In 1894 John Reese sold his farm, and it was shortly thereafter divided into lots of one acre or smaller. The purchaser claimed that there were "quite a large number of men engaged in the Phoenix Iron Works, who have expressed their determination to purchase and built on these lots."<sup>167</sup> The railroad made these lots very attractive, because the four miles from Kimberton to the factory could be covered in the same amount of time it would take to walk to work from the outskirts of Phoenixville. In addition, these buyers believed that, in the long run, it would cost less to purchase their own home, than to continue to pay the company-controlled rents.

Kimberton and the surrounding area was attractive not only to the working class of Phoenixville, but to the elite of Philadelphia as well. Though the doors of Kimberton Academy had long since closed, people from throughout the region still saw this area as a place of retreat, rest, and relaxation. In addition, it was easier to get to than ever before: stagecoaches and packet boats were no longer needed! Royal Planing Mills, located to the north of the city, received an order in 1877 for lumber to be used in the construction of a seventeen room "cottage style mansion" which was intended to house summer boarders.<sup>168</sup> The former Kimberton Academy met a similar fate after being purchased by a Philadelphian named William Moses in 1885. The estate sale notice mentioned that the forty-room main house was well-suited for use as a boarding house and was considered "a splendid chance for investment."<sup>169</sup> Moses planned to install several bathrooms and a porch and do extensive repairs, but since there are no later references to the existence of such a summer boarding house, it is possible that the project was never launched.<sup>170</sup> Those seeking a more exclusive atmosphere than a summer boarding house could choose to erect their own private clubhouse. A group of Philadelphians awarded a contract to

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<sup>167</sup> *The American Republican*, 24 February 1894.

<sup>168</sup> *The Daily Local*, 30 May 1877.

<sup>169</sup> *The Daily Local*, 18 September 1885.

<sup>170</sup> *The Daily Local*, 16 November 1885.



local builders for the construction of such a structure near Chester Springs in 1892.<sup>171</sup>

### Leisure Opportunities

The Pickering Valley Railroad opened up new opportunities for travel. It brought visitors like the wealthy businessmen to the area, but it also allowed community residents access to opportunities beyond the confines of Chester county. Prior to its construction, residents were limited to travel by wagon over rough roads to reach their destination, or else they were required to travel to Phoenixville by horse or foot to catch a packet boat, or later, a train. Travelling the twenty-six miles to Philadelphia was still rather difficult, and day trips were nearly impossible. The Pickering Valley Railroad changed all this.

Residents could pay 75¢ (adults) or 35¢ (children) for a ticket to Philadelphia and take part in activities like a Sabbath school excursion to Fairmount Park organized by a local church.<sup>172</sup> During the summer of 1876, excursion tickets to the centennial exposition sold very well.<sup>173</sup> The trip took a little over two hours, allowing time for an enjoyable visit before the return trip home in the late afternoon. Those who had saved up spare funds and wished to take a longer trip might use the Pickering Valley line on the first leg of their journey to the shore. Trips to the seaside were apparently so popular during this era that it put a dent in the local economy, "Businessmen aside from farmers, complain of dull times. After people pay out their loose change for ice cream, and their reserved funds for excursions to the sea, they have not enough left to make business at home lively."<sup>174</sup>

The line was also extensively used by residents travelling short distances along the route. A "ladies car" was a regular feature on the line. It provided a place for women, especially single women, to travel in a quiet, cozy atmosphere without the distraction of "single gents" who were not permitted in the car.<sup>175</sup> A popular local destination was

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<sup>171</sup> *The Daily Local*, 20 February 1892.

<sup>172</sup> *The Jeffersonian*, 27 July 1872.

<sup>173</sup> Letter, Essick to Wooten, 12 June 1876, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1013, The Hagley Museum and Archive, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>174</sup> *The Daily Local*, 9 August 1878.

<sup>175</sup> *The Daily Local*, 5 December 1873.



Fagley's Grove, a park near Chester Springs, which was a staging ground for all kinds of entertainments. One newspaper article mentions a three mile "go-as-you-please" walking race that was held at the track there in which three lady "walkists" took part.<sup>176</sup> Another, more lavish production had been staged there the previous summer. It was a benefit for a local farmer who had lost most of his livestock to disease. The entertainment consisted of a medieval tournament, which had been choreographed by a costumer for the Chestnut Theater in Philadelphia who had been staying in town for the summer. The event included a jousting exhibition, copious refreshments, and an evening's entertainment held at the Soldiers' Orphans School, all for the bargain price of 25¢. That night, arrangements were also made for an extra train to run from Phoenixville to accommodate all of the anticipated guests.<sup>177</sup> These types of benefits were the primary way in which community members supported one another in times of adversity. When Isaiah March, a baggage master for the railroad at Byers, lost his arm while working, a concert was held to raise money for him and his family.<sup>178</sup>

As the local population increased, and people settled near one another within the villages, opportunities for social events increased, and clubs were formed by people of like interests. In 1888 residents of Byers could participate in one of several new organizations depending on one's gender, education, or pedigree. These included the local baseball club, the Byers Literary Club, and the Patriotic Sons of America.<sup>179</sup> The larger towns had halls where balls, musical entertainments, and poetry readings were regularly held: Mount Pickering Lodge in Byers, Keystone Hall near Cambria, and Fussell and Evans' hall situated over the Chester Springs depot.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *The Daily Local*, 20 May 1880.

<sup>177</sup> *The Daily Local*, 26 August 1879.

<sup>178</sup> *The Daily Local*, 19 May 1877.

<sup>179</sup> *The Daily Local*, 10 August 1887, 27 March 1888, and 8 March 1888.

<sup>180</sup> *The Daily Local*, 3 June 1882 and 18 September 1880.





## Train Wreck

On the night of October 6, 1877 local residents experienced a terrible tragedy which newspapers later named "The Pickering Valley Railroad Horror."<sup>181</sup> Around 6:00 PM, the last westward train of the evening plunged into the dark depths of a ravine. A steady rain over the previous two days had weakened the embankment which supported the rails across the ravine. The embankment had been constructed without a culvert and, eventually, the water which drained down from the surrounding farms began to erode the foundation of the structure. The locomotive spilled headlong into the fifty foot deep chasm, doing a somersault in the air and landing on its side. It was followed by the three passenger cars. The cars horribly crushed those below when they fell, trapping the shocked passengers inside. The engineer and fireman were killed instantly by the impact, and seven more people died from injuries sustained during the wreck. Many more were seriously injured and would bear crippling injuries for the remainder of their lives.

The storm made rescue attempts difficult. Nearby farmers heard the incident and went out into the night to offer assistance. Telegraph lines had not yet been installed along the line, and so word of the wreck was passed on from person to person. Some of the first people to arrive at the scene took wagons to Phoenixville to get aid and notify local doctors. It was extremely dark, and the lanterns offered very little light. It took witnesses a few moments to realize the magnitude of the situation. Benjamin Major, the brakeman riding in the rear car, recounted his first impressions of the scene, "Instantly the air was filled with the rush of escaping steam, and the shrieks and groans of the wounded, united with the pitiless howl of the storm."<sup>182</sup> The number of injuries and casualties was likely increased due to the configuration of the train cars. Usually the milk car was placed after the engine followed by the passenger cars, but in the case of this train, the milk car (the only one that did not derail) had been placed at the rear.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 October 1877.

<sup>182</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 October 1877.

<sup>183</sup> *The Daily Local*, 8 October 1877.





Fig. 108 Photograph showing the wreckage of the ill-fated "Pickering Valley Horror" train amidst the debris of the broken embankment. Photograph Collection, Railroads - The Pickering Valley Railroad, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.



The wreck caused a degree of excitement in the community that residents had not experienced in recent history. There were other mishaps with the line, but none as deadly. In one case, an engine became stranded during a heavy snow forcing the passengers to get out and walk to shelter.<sup>184</sup> In another instance, a train hit an open switch and derailed, but no injuries were reported.<sup>185</sup> No other event impacted this community to the extreme degree that the "Pickering Valley Railroad Horror" had. Entire villages shut down for days because of the shock and communal mourning: "The town is almost like a huge grave-yard; no work is going on, mills are stopped, shops are idle and business is suspended."<sup>186</sup> Hundreds and eventually thousands of people made pilgrimages to the grim site looking on while the wreckage was pulled from the ditch and the last bodies were removed:

I was there when poor George Griffith, fireman, was taken out a mangled mass of flesh and bones. His body was the first in and the last out of the wreck. The engine was on top of him until 2:30 PM, when it was rolled over and his almost unrecognizable form was removed to the baggage car.<sup>187</sup>

There was heavy newspaper coverage of the wreck, which detailed the specifics of the accident, put forth allegations of negligence on the part of the railroad, and offered features covering the personal hardships of those involved. People were fascinated by the gory details of how Mr. and Mrs. Holman, impaled on the splintered remains of the passenger car, died in each others embrace "proving that they had met death as one and inseparable."<sup>188</sup> They lamented the vagaries of fate that allowed Joseph Tustin to be killed, since the granddaughter he had held on his lap was saved. Readers drew satisfaction from the fact that the burning woodwork of one of the cars was extinguished

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<sup>184</sup> *The Daily Local*, 9 February 1882.

<sup>185</sup> *The Daily Local*, 7 April 1882.

<sup>186</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 October 1877.

<sup>187</sup> *The Daily Local*, 6 October 1877.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*





before claiming the life of Corbin, a brakeman.<sup>189</sup> An inquest was held the following week, and litigation continued for several years until all the claims were finally settled. The event lived on, however, in the area's collective memory and in the epic poem by M. Supiot which is located in Appendix II.

### The Railroad Line Is Abandoned

It was a well known fact that, since its opening the Pickering Valley Railroad had earned little, if any, profit.<sup>190</sup> There simply were not enough freight and passenger receipts to match this line's operating costs. Still, people living along the line were loath to consider the fact that the Reading Company might renege on its lease, withdraw the financial support that enabled them to pay the interest on the bonds, and abandon the line. Rumors to this effect surfaced in 1885, less than fifteen years after the opening of the line. But the information was passed on by a Charlestown man, and people probably assumed it was simply sour grapes, since Charlestown had been rebuffed when the route was established.<sup>191</sup> The same rumors arose a few years later, but this time they came from a Philadelphia source: "It is rumored that the Reading Railroad proposes to abandon the Pickering Valley Railroad, as there is no profit in operating it."<sup>192</sup>

The rumors did not amount to anything immediately, but by the 1890's it was obvious that Reading was making substantial cutbacks. Station agents were removed from many of the stations along the line, even at Kimberton which remained a freight station of some merit. Several letters were written to the Reading Company stating that without an agent in charge to manage incoming freight, "Several market men I know that ship big loads say that if this continues they will go to the Pennsylvania Railroad with their marketing, not only with freight going down, but with freight going up as well."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.

<sup>191</sup> *The Daily Local*, 14 October 1885.

<sup>192</sup> *The Daily Local*, 23 August 1887.

<sup>193</sup> Letter, 8 May 1895, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1013, The Hagley





The writer chided the railroad for their shortsightedness, that they would forgo thousands of dollars in freight revenue to save the \$65.00 a month allotted for an agent's salary. The nearby storekeeper, Mr. Yeagar, even came forward and offered to do the work of a station agent from his business - \$25.00 a month for all services except telegraphing or \$20.00 a month for simply running the ticket office and collecting freight.<sup>194</sup>

The death knell of the railroad, however, was sounded on December 8, 1923. On that day, five thousand people attended an ox roast at the Eagle Hotel in celebration of "the new concrete highway between West Chester and Pottstown."<sup>195</sup> Each of the one hundred cars in the parade represented a nail in the coffin of the line. The Pickering Valley Railroad had assisted in the transport of the construction materials for the road. Some of its last passengers were WPA workers in the 1930's who came in from Philadelphia to work on local roads.<sup>196</sup> These highways, and later the Pennsylvania State Turnpike, promoted the versatility of trucks over trains when it came to hauling freight. Trucks could deliver products not just to your town, but right to your very door. They could also come directly to your farm to pick up the day's milk thereby obviating the need for early morning milk runs to the train platform.<sup>197</sup> Freight trains, however, did survive longer than passenger service which was discontinued in 1936.<sup>198</sup> During its final years, people still continued to use the train to conduct their weekly shopping in Phoenixville or to take short jaunts to visit friends at another stop on the line. Students from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts arrived at Yellow Springs for their summer instruction via the Pickering Valley route during the teens and twenties, and for many years older high school students took the train to Phoenixville, where classes for the

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Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>194</sup> Letter, Yeagar to Vorhees, 9 May 1895, The Philadelphia and Reading Company Records, Box 1013, The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>195</sup> *The Coatesville Times*, 8 December 1923.

<sup>196</sup> *The Downingtown Archive*, 20 June 1946.

<sup>197</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>198</sup> Notes, "1860 to 1912: The History of the Pickering Valley Railroad Between Phoenixville and Byers, Chester County, Pennsylvania," Aug. 1912, Pickering Valley Railroad, Ephemera File, Chester County Historical Society, Westchester, PA.



uppermost two grades were held.<sup>199</sup> Slowly, the less-frequented stops were closed. The flag stations went first, then Chester Springs, and later Anselma. Kimberton Station held fast, even as the Reading Company filed with the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the eastern end of the line between it and Byers.<sup>200</sup> A group of vocal residents from the Eagle / Byers area protested the shut down, stating that charges for hauling their regular shipments of fertilizer, coal, and feed by truck would price these goods out of their reach.<sup>201</sup> Nevertheless, the twice-weekly freight shipments were not enough to justify the line's continued operation. Byers station was torn down a year later and sold for scrap lumber, the tracks and ties were pulled up, and today there remain only a few traces that a railroad ever existed. In 1969, a group of railroad-buffs attempted to reopen the Kimberton / Phoenixville section of the line as an historical tourist attraction, but that did not last, and now most of those tracks have been removed or covered by asphalt and the accretions of time.

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<sup>199</sup> Walton and Windolph interview.

<sup>200</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 9 April 1947.

<sup>201</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 17 June 1947.





Fig. 109 The alignment of the Pickering Valley Railroad's tracks can be seen in the positioning of these two buildings at the former Anselma Station.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig 110 The overgrown path of the old train line near the mill at Anselma.  
Photograph by the author 1995.



## Chapter 5

### National Themes Embodied in the Pickering Valley Corridor: Linking Landscape Artifacts to an Interpretive Program

The preceding two chapters have discussed in some detail, the ways in which the landscape of the Pickering Valley corridor has been transformed since the eighteenth century. Gradually, the character of these communities shifted from their early milling and agricultural status towards their later role as commodity suppliers of produce and minerals to the greater southeastern Pennsylvania region. Each progressive transition made distinct impressions on the land and the built environment in the area, but in order to interpret the surviving physical evidence in a meaningful way, it is imperative that a clear historical context for this development be established.

The *National Register Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* state that creating a statement of historic context should be the first step in pursuing a rural historic district nomination, since it will guide future fieldwork and influence decisions on whether or not it is necessary to hire specialists.<sup>1</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Charles Birnbaum, coordinator for the National Park Service's Historic Landscape Initiative, who feels that initial research is critical for developing an understanding of spatial relationships within a landscape and for the identification of character defining features: "Research uncovers the historical evolution of a landscape and defines the features, values, and associations that are significant and, therefore, is a prerequisite to its interpretation."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the task of establishing a historic context for this area, this thesis attempts to show the way in which that research could be incorporated into the development of an interpretive recreational trail. The concept of developing a recreational

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin #30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service - Interagency Resources Division, n.d.), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Birnbaum and Robert R. Page, "Revealing the Value of Cultural Landscapes," *CRM Bulletin* 17, no. 7 (1994): 3.





trail, which would traverse Phoenixville Borough, East Pikeland, West Pikeland, and Upper Uwchlan townships, is a viable project given Chester County's current planning attitudes about community recreational needs and the desire to protect open space. While the cost of procuring rights of way to connect publicly owned land might be prohibitive at the moment, it is possible that if the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor generates its projected revenues, there may be financial support for an extended trail system in the future. By establishing a solid foundation of primary research, this thesis paves the way for the more detailed studies on specific historic resources that will be needed to develop a comprehensive interpretive program for the corridor.

Chapter two discussed the ways in which trail initiatives and cultural landscape interpretation could complement one another and reinforce preservation concerns for the natural and the built environment. Then, chapters three and four applied this abstract concept to a specific locale, the Pickering Valley corridor. The concept of viewing the development of a landscape within the context of a railroad was explored, illustrating how land uses and attitudes toward the land in rural communities changed after the introduction of rail transportation.

Hopefully, these chapters showed that vernacular landscapes, like the Pickering Valley corridor, possess a rich legacy of community history that should be tapped, if heritage tourism's efforts to convey ideas of regionalism are to succeed. The canon of traditional landmarks are not the only sites worthy of mention. In his book, *Mapping The Invisible Landscape*, Kent Ryden notes:

I also wanted to show that landscapes and places do not have to be national centers of cultural attention or to have accreted a thick sediment of well-publicized history in order to be richly significant - that a complex, deeply felt sense of place can emerge whenever and wherever people settle on the land long enough to develop shared experiences and tell stories about those experiences.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 99.



Unfortunately, in many cases, the transience of today's communities precludes the sharing of these stories and experiences. A sense of place must be actively cultivated, or communities run the risk of environmental detachment. Interpreted community trails are tools that can counteract this problem. A major goal of this thesis is to revive this community's stories, like the infamous Pickering Valley train wreck, and offer a meaningful forum in which they can be presented. This final chapter will present a potential interpretive framework that incorporates specific surviving elements of this historic landscape into an overall thematic context.

Who would be the audience for interpretation provided on the Pickering Valley recreational trail? More than likely, it would be composed of relatively new community residents or tourists, to whom local events, if presented in isolation, would have little meaning. While it is important to understand a community's goals and values during a particular historic period in order to create a realistic interpretation of a cultural landscape, it is also necessary to link local events to broader, national historic trends if capturing the interest of non-resident trail-users is a priority.<sup>4</sup>

#### Nineteenth Century Historical Themes Embodied in the Pickering Valley Corridor

The landscape of the Pickering Valley corridor, as it exists today, was shaped to a large extent during the nineteenth century. During the decades between 1800 and 1900, fields were cleared, farms were created, mills were erected, industries were established, and improvements, like the railroad, were financed and built. The farms came first, as settlers carved out a place for themselves on the land. And today, there are still numerous remaining early farm complexes with their stone houses, barns, spring houses, and stables that are situated on overgrown meadows in the Pickering Valley area. These farmsteads offer testament to the hard labor and self-reliance that was involved in establishing a

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<sup>4</sup> Everett L. Fly and La Barbara Wigfall Fly, "Ethnic Landscapes Come to Light," *Landscape Architecture* 77, no. 4 (July / August 1987): 38-39.



home on the outskirts of civilization during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The substantial size and quality of the buildings, however, reveal that perseverance in domesticating the lime-enriched soil could eventually yield a comfortable and prosperous life. The process of pushing back the frontier occurred relatively early in this portion of the country. However, it was the techniques used on these types of farms that set the stage for development in the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In those newly-opened western states, farmers quickly adopted farming methods pioneered by Pennsylvanians, using horse-drawn patented plows and reapers to cultivate large, open fields.<sup>5</sup>

The country's values shifted during the latter half of the century, as national interests in progress and mechanization took front stage. Agricultural cultivation was no longer enough. A community that merely maintained its hard-won land, was believed to be neglecting a duty to take advantage of all of the land's natural resources. Hence, the creation and eventual glorification of local mining industries and the heroic Phoenix Iron Works, which exemplified the industrial sublime. A second major theme that is objectified in the landscape of the Pickering Valley corridor is the transformation of the nature of American industry and manufacturing during the nineteenth century. It is remarkable that in such a compact strip of land, a mere twelve miles long, there exists such a varied assortment of early mills dating from the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. These mills offer a significant contrast to the site of the abandoned Phoenix Iron Works, whose most glorious years were after the Civil War.

In his book, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America*, Thomas Bender spends several chapters discussing the evolution of industry from an activity which was compatible and philosophically dependent on a rural situation, to an entity that eventually created an urban environment for itself and

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<sup>5</sup> John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982),186.



undermined its pastoral surroundings. During the early nineteenth century, it was believed that American industry would be saved from the squalor that characterized British industrial centers by the bucolic power of its setting alone. Bender offers the following quote from *The American Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Manufactures* in 1847 as evidence of this belief:

...Our factories will not require to be situated near mines of coal, to be worked by fire or steam, but rather on chosen sites, by the fall of waters, and the running stream, the seats of health and cheerfulness, where good instruction will secure the morals of the young, and good regulations will promote, in all, order, cleanliness, and the exercise of civil duties.<sup>6</sup>

This concept can be seen in the development of the early mills that arose in the Pickering Valley corridor during the first half of the nineteenth century. They derived their source of power from the briskly flowing waters of the French and Pickering Creeks, which offered sufficient fall to run many mills; some smaller such as the individually run flour mills, and other, somewhat larger concerns, like the woolen mills which generally employed fewer than a dozen people. The setting was quiet, rural and rather isolated from the larger region. During this half of the century, none of the manufacturing concerns outgrew the system of small villages which then organized the countryside. The concept of industry in the Pickering Valley during this era remained firmly integrated with Jefferson's concept of an agrarian republic.<sup>7</sup>

By the 1850's and 1860's, however, the iron works on the mouth of the French Creek had grown large enough to necessitate the creation of a new sort of town, one with an urban character where the majority of residents worked full time in the factory rather than splitting their time between agricultural work and practicing a trade on the side. As Phoenixville grew from a simple nail cutting factory into one of the nation's foremost producers of finished iron products, the scale of industry changed dramatically. Simple

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Bender, *Toward An Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Bender, 25.





stone structures which had characterized early milling technology were overwhelmed by enormous rolling mills of fabricated iron columns which covered acres of land. The technological advancements of the latter half of the century dwarfed earlier milling methods.

The Phoenix Iron Works had outgrown its rural setting opting, instead, for urban autonomy when it was incorporated in 1849. Among the reasons for pursuing incorporation was, "Because it is our interest to be separated from the large agricultural district surrounding us..."<sup>8</sup> As was the case with Lowell, Massachusetts, this new identity brought with it new problems of urban poverty, lower standards of living, and rising public health and safety issues.<sup>9</sup> In Phoenixville, criminal acts became regular occurrences by the late 1860's as seen in the following notice: "Robberies - Phoenixville appears to be suffering from an attack of burglars. Every week we chronicle two or three until it would seem that the happy man is the man who had nothing."<sup>10</sup> Industry's gradual shift away from small establishments that served local and regional needs, to mammoth complexes like the Phoenix Iron Works that served national interests, affected the development of surrounding areas. Portions of the Pickering Valley near Phoenixville chose the path of industrial opportunities and were consequently remade in an urban image, forsaking the region's traditional, agricultural, milling-village character.

A third theme, the concept of nineteenth century advancements in transportation, is also illustrated in the landscape of the Pickering Valley. Access to reliable transportation routes has shaped the development of this country since its inception. Canals represented the first engineered alternative to overland travel. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, improvements were being made to enable navigation along the Schuylkill River on the eastern end of the corridor. As with the rest of the nation, road conditions in the area were extremely poor. Even when the streets were not blocked by

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<sup>8</sup>*Village Republic*, 25 January 1849.

<sup>9</sup>Bender, 108.

<sup>10</sup>*Village Republic*, 28 December 1869.



snow or mud, packet boats plying the river offered the preferred method of transportation. The Chester County canal, which is located on the western side of the Schuylkill River in Phoenixville and was constructed to serve the iron works, is evidence of the utility of water transport to early industry. Water routes were used not only for passenger service, but for hauling freight as well. There is no documentation to indicate that either the French or the Pickering Creeks were substantial enough to support water transportation and, perhaps as a consequence, the western end of the corridor developed very slowly until the last quarter of the century.

Despite their superiority over local roads, canals had their limitations. The cost of construction was high, development was confined to a narrow corridor, and they were unusable when frozen.<sup>11</sup> Railroads became the answer to demands for rapid movement of natural resources and manufactured materials, "Phoenixville was connected to the greater Philadelphia area in 1842 when, after ten years had been devoted to the construction of necessary bridges and tunnels, that section of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad line finally opened."<sup>12</sup> This line helped supply the Phoenix Iron Works with iron ore from the northern sections of Chester County and provided a means of shipping the company's products to larger markets, but did little to develop the communities farther west. That need was eventually met in 1871 with the opening of the Pickering Valley spur line.

The spur line brought many changes to these villages, the details of which have been discussed in the previous chapter. In his book, *The Incorporation of America*, Alan Trachtenberg discusses the ways in which railroads changed the national consciousness, and those changes applied to the Pickering Valley as well. The pace of life increased, being governed by time tables and town clocks.<sup>13</sup> New employment opportunities arose

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<sup>11</sup> David R. Meyer, "The new industrial order," chapter 13 in *The Making of the American Landscape*, Michael Conzen, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 252-53.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker, Esq., *Annals of Phoenixville and its Vicinity: From the Settlement to the Year 1871* (Philadelphia: Bavis and Pennypacker, Printers, 1872), 179.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, Eric Foner, consulting editor (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1982), 59.



for those seeking an alternative to farming or the factory. New commercial products and building materials were made available, and suburbs arose in Kimberton to meet the needs of Phoenixville's factory workers, who wanted to escape their urban situation. The important goal of obtaining railroad access was recognized by rural communities throughout the nation, "Even on the distant prairies, Olmstead noted in 1870, clothing, furniture, food, conversation already displayed 'intimacy' with the town...the railway time table hangs with the almanac."<sup>14</sup> Trains brought goods, mail, and visitors and, in turn, shipped local wares to larger metropolitan markets, thereby providing additional economic possibilities for otherwise isolated communities. The railroad reshaped life in the Pickering Valley corridor, as it had already done with many other areas across the country.

The most recent advancement in transportation that has reconfigured the relationship of community residents to the Pickering Valley landscape is the introduction of the automobile and the upgrading of roads in the area. The Pennsylvania Turnpike with an exit at Route 100 in Eagle took the place of the railroad. The realignment of Route 113 has significantly altered travelers' perceptions of the towns of Pikeland, Yellow Springs, and Chester Springs which were once connected by smaller, more intimate lanes. Speed is now the norm, and people are insulated from directly experiencing the landscape while in their cars. Suburban developments are arising at an amazingly fast rate, as automobiles gradually shrink commuting distances, and sprawl continues its inexorable forward movement. This trend is being experienced by many communities that continue to exist in the shadows of major metropolitan areas. The car has brought about a transformation that is as fundamental to our understanding of the twentieth century, as that initiated by the railroads and industrial development during the nineteenth century. Once again, the Pickering Valley embodies a national trend, although this time it represents the present, not the past.

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<sup>14</sup> Trachtenberg, 113.



## An Interpretive Program for the Corridor

The Pickering Valley corridor possesses landmark buildings, structures, and districts of recognized national importance. Its landscape is marked with traces of over two centuries of agricultural and industrial development, including architectural elements and landscape artifacts. The corridor encompasses land in various states of what the National Register Guidelines would call 'integrity,' and successfully integrating the historic remains into a unified interpretive program will be a challenging task. In this thesis, I do not intend to create a full interpretive plan for the corridor, but I will offer some insights on key aspects of interpretation that should be considered.

The interpretation of open-ended vernacular landscapes has presented a new challenge to landscape architects and preservationists. The *CRM Bulletin 17* presents two current projects that seek to address this challenge: the interpretation of Ebey's Landing, a national historical reserve on Whidbey Island, WA in Puget Sound, which is administered by the National Park Service and St. Mary's City, MD, the state's colonial capital and a rich archeological site that will be operated as an interpreted history park.<sup>15</sup> In both cases, a thematic outline was developed to organize the interpretive information. The themes at Ebey's Landing focused on general categories: human history, natural history, architectural history, and visual resources.<sup>16</sup> In the St. Mary's City interpretation, however, specific themes, which directly related to the city's historical development, were applied to individual archeological sites in the complex. Examples of these themes include: worshipping, growing, defending, trading, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Conveying the evolution of a landscape in terms of interlocking themes would be a method that could be applied to the Pickering Valley corridor as well. The corridor includes ten separate areas of clustered historic resources that would merit inclusion in a

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<sup>15</sup> Gretchen Luxenberg, "Interpreting Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve," *CRM Bulletin* 17, no. 7 (1994): 41. and Patricia M. O'Donnell, "Relating Integrity to Interpretation," *CRM Bulletin* 17, no. 7 (1994): 12.

<sup>16</sup> Luxenberg, 43.

<sup>17</sup> O'Donnell, 14.





comprehensive interpretive program. Among these are: the French Creek Basin area in Phoenixville, the Snyder's Mill complex outside Kimberton, the village of Kimberton, a section of Kimberton Road between that village and its intersection with Art School Road, and the villages of Pikeland, Yellow Springs, Chester Springs, Anselma, Byers, and Eagle (see page 256 for a map locating these sites). These historic sites present unique aspects of the community's evolution, and each should each have interpretive information made available either through a published guide or installed signage. These guides and signs should provide background information on each site's specific resources. There should also be a brief discussion of a specific theme that ties the resources into the historical continuum of the area.

Recent issues of the *CRM Bulletin* have presented a variety of techniques for interpreting landscapes. Some employ technology like audio-tapes or short-range radio transmissions, which allow for in-vehicle interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Other approaches utilize more traditional means such as road-side signs and way-side exhibits. In one article, Richard Rabinowitz, president of the American History Workshop, discusses the merits and drawbacks of 1) placing interpretation on the landscape in the form of markers, 2) bringing interpretation into the landscape in the form of maps or guides, and 3) building an interpretation out of the landscape by emphasizing and revealing actual historical artifacts or creating and installing works of public art that pick up on historic themes and capture the public's attention and imagination.<sup>19</sup>

The first step in developing an interpretive plan for this corridor should be to create a compact guide with a map that is keyed to the significant historical resources in the area. The map need not be simply a dry representation of the pertinent facts. It should draw people's imagination into the sense of place of the Pickering Valley corridor. Kent

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Risk, "Interpretation, A Road to Creative Enlightenment," *CRM Bulletin* 17, no. 7 (1994): 48.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rabinowitz, "Interpreting in the Landscape: A Hebridean Perspective," *CRM Bulletin* 17, no. 7 (1994): 10, 11, 15.



Ryden's chapter on cartography and imagination in his work, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, does a great deal to reveal the vast potential that maps, especially old examples, have to uncover the essence of a landscape. He states, "maps have perennially inspired people to journey to the lands they represent, to translate their signs and symbols into lived experience....," and that is the action this guide should attempt to foster. It should offer people physical access to the landscape so that they can make their own discoveries, while concurrently providing them with sufficient information to engage their imagination.<sup>20</sup> Later stages in the development of an interpretive program might include the installation of informational kiosks for use by those who do not have printed guides and maps. The program could also eventually include, with the support of the communities involved, some aspect of public art which conveys an historic theme and helps build the interpretation "out of the cultural landscape."<sup>21</sup> This approach has been used in places like Portland where the installation of a bronze beaver on a busy downtown street reminds residents of the area's early fur trading industry.<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, interpretation should be developed that addresses an audience traveling by car and an audience traveling by non-motorized means along the recreational trail. The latter, obviously, allowing for a more intimate look at the landscape than is possible with the former. Unfortunately, current traffic levels and the winding, narrow character of many of the roads in the area, precludes experiencing the length of the corridor without the aid of a car. Traveling the proposed route on a bicycle would be prohibitively dangerous at present. The creation of a guide to the cultural landscape of this area is not absolutely dependent on the recreational trail, although allowing people to have direct contact with their environment as they pass through it by their own power definitely offers a much more fulfilling and meaningful experience. Offering a guided automobile route which touches on the notable historic resources and roughly parallels

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<sup>20</sup> Ryden, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Rabinowitz, 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



the proposed recreation trail may serve to stir up interest in the main project of creating a recreational trail for non-motorized use.

### A Specific Route Through the Corridor

The route I propose would start at the French Creek Basin (Site #1) where the Phoenix Iron Works once stood. While the majority of the iron works was destroyed during the 1980's, there are sufficient elements remaining that could be used to launch a discussion of the area's industrial history and the effects that it had on the surrounding landscape. These elements include: the late-nineteenth century foundry building; an adjacent, intact row of workers housing; and the French Creek itself, which enabled the creation of the manufacturing concern and underwent continual manipulation. This stream was tamed by a dam, straightened into a channel, and gradually filled by slag. There are numerous railroad bridges, in various states of disrepair, which traverse the creek and indicate the ways in which materials were moved about the site. Farther down the creek near the river is the Chester County canal, which provided a route for shipping goods and materials by water. Above the canal is tunnel hill, an engineering landmark which enabled Phoenixville's connection to the regional railroad line. The town's industrial character should be discussed in the general background information on the site, since it may no longer be readily apparent to the outside visitor. The theme of transportation advancements, and how they enabled local industrial development, should be emphasized using landscape artifacts like the canal, with its intact locks, and the remnants of the once extensive railroad system.

Snyder's Mill (Site #2) is the next stop on the route. The traveler will move west from the center of Phoenixville through the center of town, turn right onto Nutt Road (Route 23), then left onto Route 113, and finally right onto Rapp's Dam Road. Where the road crosses the French creek at the Rapp's Dam covered bridge, are the remains of the Snyder's Mill. The mill site was used from the revolutionary war era until the 1930's, and evidence of the system of races, the dam, and several stone structures remain. The





Fig. 111 Abandoned railroad bridge in the French Creek Basin at the site of the Phoenix Iron Works. Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 112 Row of workers' housing on the edge of the French Creek Basin. Photograph by the author, 1995.







Fig. 113 Stone pier from a vanished building at Snyder's Mill, East Pikeland Township.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.





Fig. 114 Masonry sluice gate for one of the races at Snyder's Mill near its juncture with the French Creek. Photograph by the author, 1994.



property was recently awarded to East Pikeland township by the State of Pennsylvania, and there is interest in conducting archaeological excavation at the site for potential future interpretation.<sup>23</sup> The background information on the site should discuss how the mill site was adapted to process a variety of materials during its century and a half of use. During that period, site was converted from a powder mill, into an oil mill. In the 1850's it became a powder mill once again, and the structure finally ended its useful life as a flour mill. The thematic comparison should also be made between this mill and the site of the Phoenix Iron Works. The comparison would show the similarities and differences in the ways in which early and late manifestations of industry affected their surrounding landscapes.

After experiencing this site, the traveler will turn around and proceed back along Rapp's Dam Road, and then turn right onto Kimberton Road which leads to the village of that name (Site #3). The theme to be emphasized in Kimberton is a comparison of the two different approaches to building which illustrate the town's two major stages of development. The first stage is related to the establishment of the tavern and school, which had occurred by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and the second stage emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the construction of the Pickering Valley Railroad. Discussion of this theme could revolve around the concept of changing architectural styles. This shift is clearly articulated in the differences between the old town core at the crossroads, which contains the Sign of the Bear Tavern, one wing of the Kimberton School, and Chrisman's Mill, all constructed of local stone, and the newer quarter of the village which encompasses the train station, the old creamery, the general store ( all of rail-transported brick), and one frame manufacturing plant. By looking at building types and construction methods, and considering the context in which

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<sup>23</sup> This interest was expressed by Jane Davidson, Chester County Heritage Preservation Coordinator, in a meeting with the author on 13 March 1995.





Fig. 115 Crisman's Mill at the intersection of Hares' Hill Road and Kimberton Road.  
• The mill now serves as the township's post office.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 116 The last surviving wing of the Kimberton Boarding School, situated directly across Hares' Hill Road from Crisman's Mill.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.







Fig. 117 Farmstead on Kimberton Road.

•The scene presents typical elements of this rural landscape: houses, secondary structures, fences, meadows, and wood lots on the horizon.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



they were created, the visitor can begin to understand the underlying forces that shaped the evolution of this particular townscape.

As visitors pass out of Kimberton on the northwestern extension of Kimberton Road, a new type of landscape unfolds, contrasting the village landscape that lies behind them. This section of road (Site #4) is flanked by a number of large farmsteads that have maintained considerable land holdings with cultivated fields and intact woodlots. Many of these farms also include secondary buildings, which can be viewed from the roadside and provide a point of departure for a discussion of the organizational structure and working conditions on a local nineteenth century farm. The interpretation of this section of the route should concentrate on the ways in which agricultural practice shaped this landscape as contrasted with industrial processes, and discuss the way in which accessible transportation brought by the railroad changed economic conditions for farmers over the course of the nineteenth century.

Travelers will turn right at the intersection of Kimberton Road and Art School Road. Art School Road will lead them to the Historic Yellow Springs complex that remains, with the exception of the Washington Building which was destroyed by fire, essentially intact in its 1830's form. The site contains several of the institutional buildings that housed a variety of groups over the years, first patrons of the mineral springs resort, later soldiers, orphans in the late nineteenth century, and then students from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the early part of this century. The bucolic setting has become significantly overgrown in the intervening decades since the springs drew their first visitors, but people are still attracted to the site because of its natural beauty provided by its shaded groves and burbling springs. The opportunity should be taken at this site to discuss the difference between the way visitors to the site saw the landscape of the Yellow Springs area, and how permanent residents viewed their surroundings.

Retracing the route along Art School road, will bring the visitor to an intersection with Pikeland Road. A right turn will take the visitor into the tiny village of





Fig. 118 The main hall at Yellow Springs.

•Note the shade provided by the mature trees surrounding the building. The image is evocative of the grove depicted on the 1848 advertising broadside, though the character of the area surrounding the building is now much less open than it was during that period.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.





Fig. 119 The Yellow Springs pool house and gazebo with a view of the overgrown, surrounding vegetation.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.







Fig. 120 View down Village Lane into Pkeland  
•Note the intimacy of the scale.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Pikeland, which is dominated by a series of monumental concrete train trestles that parade before the small, stone buildings nearby (Site #6). Village Lane, a dead-end road that runs parallel to Route 113 and passes through the village, was once a through-street that connected Pikeland and Chester Springs. That road is now closed, but a walk along it provides the visitor with a sense of an earlier landscape as it existed before the car became a dominating feature. The scale is different, as well as the pace of movement along its length. The main aspect of interpretation that should be presented at this site is the way in which the railroad made a dramatic physical appearance which significantly altered the existing landscape. This can be seen in the proximity of Pikeland's houses to the trestles. The interpretation should try and evoke an image of the townscape during those six times a day when the train whistled past.

A short jaunt west on Route 113 brings the visitor into Chester Springs (Site #7). Not much is left of the village besides the "Pickering Mill Feed Store," which once served as the local train depot. Nearby are several clusters of houses that date to the railroad era and were once surrounded by the bustle of a busy rail town. Discussion of this site could build on the concept presented in Pikeland. Namely, how did the railroad manifest its presence in the landscape? In Pikeland the remaining evidence of the trestles shows the railroad's physical presence, and in Chester Springs, the survival of the depot and feed store presents the railroad's effectual presence which is less tangible, but just as significant. The depot and its accompanying sidings allowed for the export of the corridor's produce, dairy, and mining products, and provided a storage facility for necessary imported goods like coal and lumber, which were not produced locally. The depot was tied to all facets of this community's existence, since it facilitated the processes of importing and exporting, which directly affected all residents.

The route then proceeds west along Route 113 with a right turn onto Route 401, Conestoga Pike. Less than a mile up this road on the left is Walnut Lane. If one looks to the right side of Route 401 during the winter, before the hill becomes overgrown with





Fig. 121 Chester Springs Depot.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



Fig. 122 Railroad ties from the Pickering Valley Line used near the depot in the construction of a retaining wall. The wall is supporting the former embankment that once ran above the gravel road.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.





Fig. 123 Anselma depot and the former right of way of the Pickering Valley Railroad.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.







Fig. 124 The old Byers Hotel, now a private residence.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



Fig. 125 Abandoned graphite processing mill on Byers Road.  
Photograph by the author, 1995.



vegetation, an embankment that is now blocked by a farm gate can be seen. On the left side of the road is the Anselma depot (Site #8). Its outline is very similar to the Chester Springs depot, but a large number of windows had been inserted into the building when it was converted into a chicken house. Behind the depot, obscured by the woods, is the Lightfoot Mill. The mill is owned by the French and Pickering Creek Trust, but has not yet been opened for public interpretation. Hopefully, when this occurs, the two historic sites can be visually linked once again.

The land between the two structures shows evidence of the mill landscape. Races and a mill pond remain prominent, as well as evidence of the railroad's former presence. A path through the woods, which intersects one of the mill races, follows the former course of the tracks. Situated below that grade is a surviving stone bridge, which once carried the train tracks over a small creek near the mill. A key theme for interpreting the junction of these two historic sites, one from the eighteenth century and the other dating to the railroad era, is the concept of a community core. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the community's needs changed. The farmers had once met and exchanged news at the grist mill, but by the end of the century, the general store and post office at the depot took over its role as a place of local congregation.

Farther north on Route 401 the interpretive corridor's route takes a left turn at Byers Road. Somewhere along this route, a wayside station should be placed which discusses the graphite operations that took place on much of this land between Chester Springs and Byers. Photographs showing the effects of strip mining and tunnel mining on the surrounding landscape should be compared to the landscape today. The focus of interpretation in Byers should be on the way in which mining, in combination with the railroad, essentially created the town (Site #9). Very little physical evidence of the railroad era remains in Byers, but there is an extensive amount of primary documentation on that period of the town's history in the form of ephemera, maps, and photographs. All of the railroad structures are now gone, and only one graphite processing structure





Fig. 126 View south towards Route 113 from the Conestoga Pike.  
•Note the contrast between the meadow and farm in the foreground and the tract development creeping over the rise of the hill.  
Photograph by the author, 1994.



survives. Most of the remaining buildings are residential and have probably survived, because they had a continued use after the abandonment of the mines and the railroad. The old bank and hotel still remain, offering evidence of former prosperous times. They since been converted into an office and a private residence. Several groups of workers' housing remain, as well as more elaborate homes, that were built by the village's primary land owners, who grew wealthy with the advent of the railroad era and its accompanying development.

The end of the route is less than a mile down Byers Road at the village of Eagle (Site #10). As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, Eagle has been practically overrun by development related to its location on Route 100. The intimate scale, that has remained intact to a large degree in the other villages along the route, has been lost entirely, obscured by a blur of tractor trailers on their way to the turnpike and recreational vehicles heading for the nearby state park. The crossroads location that gave the village life in the eighteenth century, is now a threat to its continued existence. The theme I propose for this site is a discussion of the important role that planning plays in maintaining a high quality of life. Lack of foresight condemned Eagle to a transformation that has fundamentally undermined its character, but given proper awareness of the community's cultural landscape and its character-defining features, this scenario does not have to be repeated.





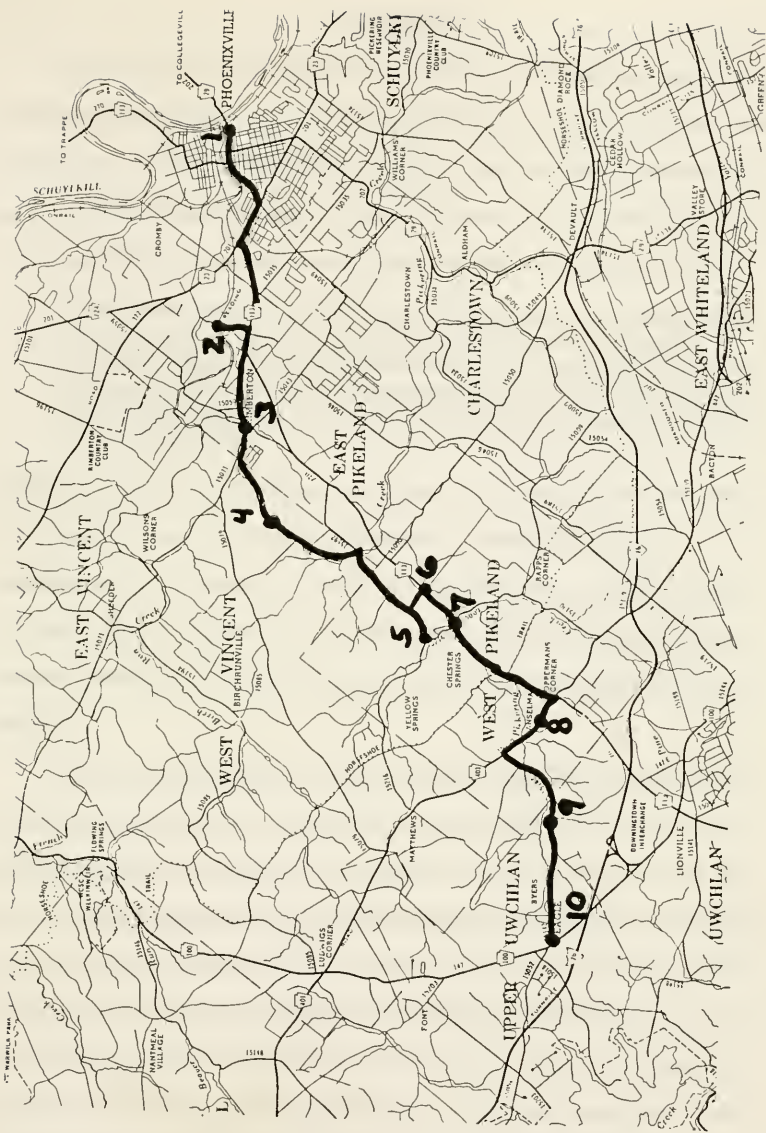


Fig. 127 Base map of the Pickering Valley corridor with a key locating the historic sites and the interpretive route through the area. Base map obtained from the Chester County Planning Office, West Chester, PA.



## Conclusions

It is not realistic for preservation advocates to believe that residents of a given community necessarily appreciate the historic resources around them. In fact, many communities like those in the Pickering Valley corridor are full of new residents who possess only the faintest awareness of the significance of their adopted cultural landscape. People must first be exposed to history in order to make it a part of their lives.

For those who have developed a sense of place, then, it is as though there is an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance - an invisible landscape, if you will, of imaginative landmarks - superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map. To passing observers, however, that landscape will remain invisible unless it is somehow called to their attention.<sup>24</sup>

After having spent the past six months exploring the Pickering Valley landscape in a variety of seasons and delving into archives to uncover the hidden reminiscences of the communities within it, I have now seen a great deal of this invisible landscape. In this thesis I hope to have revealed the Pickering Valley's "invisible landscape" to the general public, because its rich past deserves a wide audience.

In his article on protecting rural landscapes, Robert Melnick states that "it is necessary to look for new techniques both to understand and to care for those landscapes which, by their quality and significance, serve to connect us with the past."<sup>25</sup> Linking interpretation of the common American landscape with recreation trails, whether they be greenways or rail-trails, is a new technique which supports a goal that is fundamental to preservation - cultivating a constituency that is aware of the world around them. Establishing an interpretive program for the historic landscape in an existing or proposed linear park is within the capabilities of any committed community group. The creation of a guided brochure is quite

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<sup>24</sup>Ryden, 40.

<sup>25</sup>Robert Z. Melnick, "Protecting Rural Cultural Landscapes: Finding Value in the Countryside," *Landscape Journal* 2, no. 2 (1983): 97.



inexpensive, and the development of a system of signage is slightly more costly, but when compared to other recreational costs, still manageable. Interpretive trails provide a means by which a community's memory can be revitalized, and I believe that vital, self-aware communities are more likely to make thoughtful decisions about preservation planning.

As planners embrace the concept of linear parks, and rail lines continue to be abandoned, thousands of miles of the American landscape are being opened to a waiting public. Preservationists cannot afford to ignore this forum; a vast audience of trail-users awaits the unveiling of our nation's cultural landscapes, each of which has been enriched by countless layers of history and communal remembrances of past events and experiences.



## Appendix I

Transcription of:

"Address to the People on the Construction of a Railroad."

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA  
Manuscript Division - Elias Oberholtzer Papers.

My Fellow-Citizens: The construction of a railroad through our valley from the Schuylkill River westward has been a subject of thought and conjecture among us for many years. Our rich farms, productive mines, and numerous water powers have cried in vain for railroad communication with some great central place of business. No farms are richer in fertility than ours. No mines yielding better ores. No businessmen more enterprising. Yet we see land poorer in quality selling for \$50. more per acre. They see ore mined with doubly the profit to the owner. They getting 75 cts. per ton where we get but 33cts. We see new business enterprises springing up all along their streams on account of Railroad communication while ours are comparatively idle. My friends it is no longer possible for us to stand this, we must be up and doing lest the heritage pass from us.

Five years ago the Phoenix Iron Co. together with some of our own citizens conceived the idea of running a Railroad from Phoenixville to the Eagle. My friend Mr. Prizer went to Harrisburg and secured a charter. The Reading RR Co. put out their surveyors and pronounced the route easy and the cons much in cheap. Two routes were surveyed one by the way of Kimberton to Phoenixville, the other by following the banks of Pickering Creek. The latter route was reported by the surveyors much the easiest and cheapest. The estimate of the cost of grading and bridging being only one half that of Kimberton Route. The Phoenix Iron Co. say we will have it come into Phoenixville. The RRR Co. say it must come down Pickering creek and go to Phoenixville by using part of their road. Many of our citizens had paid installments on their stock subscriptions, yet on account of the jealousy of the companies the subject was dropped. I am thus particular in





giving details, because before looking up this matter I had often wondered why the enterprise had been abandoned so unexpectedly. Let this be a warning to us my friends, to let know petty jealousies divide us, for only in union and harmony is their strength united we succeed, divided we fall.

A few weeks ago some of us in talking the matter over concluded that if this road was ever to be built the time was now. We made inquiry of gentlemen of means and they made us liberal promises. Thus encouraged my friend Mr. Deans and myself waited on the Phoenix Iron Co., the heaviest stockholder in the old corporation to learn something of their plans in regard to the road, and offer them the united support of our people. We found them both willing and anxious for us to have a road, but we must first wait until they had completed a road up French Creek by Pughtown to Lancaster city, and then we could slip a branch into their road making a junction at Kimberton. Gentlemen, we could not see it?? We could not see the utility of a road that made two junctions to get to Philadelphia. It would not develop our country. It would not accommodate our people. It would not enhance the value of our property. We came home determined if the people would support us to build a road independently down Pickering Creek and unite with the Reading Railroad at the mouth of the stream on the East and with Waynesburgh road on the west. The few we talked with at home did support us and gentlemen when you hear what I have further to disclose I believe that you all will support us, and work with us, and aid us with your means until the thing is accomplished.

We went to see the President of the Reading RR Co. Mr. Smith. Stated our business and our prospects, our hopes and our fears. Say he, "Gentlemen, What we have done for the Perkiomen Railroad we will also do for your. We will give you \$30,000 in cash. We will go your security for all the money you may want to borrow, and pay the interest punctually at our office. We will pay you the principal of these bonds as fast as the road can earn it and in addition we will give you one third of all the freight coming off our road and ..... five miles up yours. A coal dealer 5 miles up the road can not only



pay his freight on our road with his bonds but he gets also one third of all the freight from the mouth of the Pickering to Pottsville. A miller holding a bond can not only pay his freights on our road with his bond but he can also get one third of the freight form its terminus to Philadelphia. So with the shipping of ore, of lumber, and every description of freight amounting to 100 dollars."

If you see this...unreadable...it will be but a few years until the bonds are paid principal and interest. He says "Go home and tell your people that they can rely on the assistance of the R.R. Co. Anytime you come to us and say go, we will send out our surveyors free of charge to survey the route. You furnish the money and we will grade your road. We will bridge your road. We will lay its ties, its rails, furnish its rolling stock, and run it to your advantage and to ours. Who is there among us that would ask a better offer than that. Who is there among us that if a wealthy capitalist should come to him and say here, I will buy you a farm. I will pay for one third of it in cash. I will give you the advantage of my credit to borrow all the balance. I will stock it for you. I will do all the work and give your all the profits. Who is there who would not jump at such an offer as that ? The cases are very similar.

Having heard this much gentlemen, we have called you together here today to take measures for the prosecution of this work. Let me assure you at the start the undertaking is no easy one. We have to raise \$300,000 by stock and by loans. First we ask your for stock for which we promise you nothing, then we ask your for loans for which we promise your principal and interest. The interest regularly and punctually ... and the principal as fast as the road can earn it before very long. Is there any one on the route of the road who will not subscribe to the extent of his means to its stock. Is there any one having the welfare of his country at heart that will not subscribe to its loans. Understand we ask no man for a single copper until its success is sure. We shall ask nothing until the whole amount is subscribed ...unreadable. I honestly believe we shall succeed.



I know that our people have too much enterprise to let such an opportunity go unimproved. They are tired of getting up in the dead of night and riding a half dozen miles across the country through darkness through mud, through storms, to take the early train. They are tired of hauling their freight for miles over bad roads. They are tired of selling their farms for \$25.00 an acre less than they are bringing along railroads. They are tired of paying all they get for their iron ore to teams for hauling it. They are tired of skimming their milk and churning the cream into butter when they could sell the milk if they had a railroad for one third more money than the butter would bring them. They are heartily tired of all these things and they will work, and they will pay, and they will beg until the means are secured for its completion, knowing that the future will pay them far more than their outlay.

The young and middle aged will work for it and contribute towards its funds, because they know it is their advantage to do so. The old men will assist with their means for they know that in no other way can they leave so rich a heritage to their children. I believe this road can be built. There are at any rate 1000 farms and mills and manufactures and mines and stores and schools that will be benefited on an average \$1000 each by the building of this railroad. \$1000 times 1000 are \$1,000,000. Will not men pay \$300,000 to get \$1,000,000? Certainly they will. It would be getting 100 per cent for their money. Where can money be invested to pay ... unreadable... wins nor oil stocks will not do it. In no way can money be invested to pay a larger interest and make a man rich faster than in a railroad passing through or near his property. I feel an intense interest in this matter but as I want to hear the views of others, I will say no more.



## Appendix II

Transcription of:  
"The Wreck of the Pickering Valley"

Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA  
Ephemera File - Pickering Valley Railroad.

The following piece of poetry was written on the fatal accident on the fatal accident on the Pickering Valley Railroad, on the night of October 4, 1877 in which forty persons were wounded and seven killed.

1.

The close of October the fourth  
Was a dark and stormy night,  
Not in the canopy above  
Could be seen a single light.

2.

Darker grew the night,  
Harder the Storm did blow  
And all around and about  
Did the raging waters flow.

3.

As the wind and rain are blowing  
And wilderness prevails throughout,  
The train of the Pickering Valley  
Homeward is on her route.

4.

Joyful are her passengers  
That homeward are on their way  
Happy in their merry making  
They have spend a pleasant day.

5.

As they sit and talk together  
With those they dearly love  
None knows the danger waiting,  
Save him who smiles above.





6.  
One plunge and all is over  
In a fearful mass they lay.  
None knows how many's living  
Or whom is returned today.

7.  
Deep in the gorge of death  
Full thirty feet at a word,  
Among the noise of voices  
The water's roar is heard.

8.  
'Tis that, has caused the rain  
In such a time as this,  
It has washed away the embankments  
And caused this sad debris.

9.  
Soon news is spread abroad.  
Everyone is offering aid,  
The spot is soon thickly crowded  
And many preparations made.

10.  
All manfully go to work  
The wounded to relieve  
And many are waiting  
The dead bodies to receive.

11.  
With their pallid faces lifted  
Lie beneath the clouded sky.  
They are dead while all around them  
In abject misery lie.

12.  
The shrieks are real and heartrending  
As they fall upon the ear.  
All about the people are groaning,  
Trembling from cold and fear.

13.  
At length all are removed  
From Underneath the ruin,  
Except the brakeman and fireman,  
Their rescue can't be soon.



14.

Fearful are the sufferings.  
Borne by the former man.  
To aid and abate his pain,  
They are doing all they can.

15.

Fastened he has to suffer,  
Around him the waters foam  
But he's released from all  
Being taken to his home.

16.

Only one more, the fireman  
His removal at last they complete,  
How glad are the hearts of all  
Their duty is not to repeat.

17.

The brave man that lies  
So silent now is dead  
At their post and at their duty  
Departed this life can be said.

18.

How thankful ought all to be  
Who were so mercifully spared  
To think how near not to be  
The lot of the dead they shared.

19.

Those that are gone are at rest  
A sad fate they all had to share,  
But as intended it was  
They are all in a merciful care.

20.

The thought of this makes it divine  
To the sad, stricken friends left behind  
May this sad event ever prove  
A warning to all mankind.

21.

Over all it has cast a gloom  
To think of the number of slain,  
But this is a comforting thought  
In time we may all meet again.

M. Supiot



## Appendix III

### "Railroad Rules - As In Use On - The Pickering Valley, And All Other Grand Trunk Throughfares."

Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA  
Ephemera File - Pickering Valley Railroad.

# RAILROAD RULES AS IN USE ON THE PICKERING VALLEY And all other Grand Trunk Throughfares.

#### TRAINS AND CARS.

There shall be three classes of trains—first, second and third—each to be run at the right of way in the order named.

The first-class shall consist of coal trains only. They shall have preference over everything else.

The second-class includes mail, construction and mixed trains.

The third-class consists of passenger trains—way, accommodation and express.

No passenger train shall pass a coal train until the coal train has passed it.

A passenger train, No. 217, shall lay over at Phoenixville until all passengers can go to Roberts' Drug Store and procure a porous plaster of any kind, for 10 cents.

Trains will be second-class after leaving the junction. When chewing liquorice, the train must stop at the window.

Trains must run on time except when an accident or the President's special car is on the road. On such occasions all regular trains will be delayed one hour.

Trains approaching each other must always move in opposite directions and as follows:

No females will be allowed in the first-class or second-class cars, after ladies or closets will be allowed on trains which have a parlor car attached. For any of these luxuries the passenger must pay extra.

McGockin's Worm Medicine is the best in the world for colic and worms.

Prepared only by Roberts, at his Drug Store, in Phoenixville, at 25 cents a bottle.

A lamp applied to an engine indicates that the fireman is drunk—the smoke stack up-side down denotes that a rail was up.

If the engineer sees a rat on the fence he must bring his red shirt on the throttle. The fireman will respond by throwing two chunks of coal.

A hot-box when the train is at Pottstown or Harrisville signifies that the engineer is dry. Time will be given to attend to the matter.

A red flag on the rear of a passenger train denotes that a Union Superior is on board.

When you see a conductor throw a cigar stump on the track, offer him a fresh Havana, such run up town and make him subscribe for the Messenger, of Phoenixville, only \$2 a year.

Seven tools of the whistle which there is a call on the track. The fireman will get out on the point and attach two green flags to his tail. The call will then be to "set the axle."

If he don't make schedule time, call the conductor.

When a baggage master acts as conductor he must put on two airs if on a regular train and three airs if on an extra.

Engineers must not use the oil can for whiskey except at Norristown. Nobody knows so law.

When a baggage master takes a deadhead passenger he will place his hand upon his hip, a la schuyler.

Job work done neatly and expeditiously at the Messenger's office, Phoenixville.

#### CONDUCTORS, &c.

All employees must be polite and courteous, must wear the uniform, and must subscribe for the Messenger to keep them posted.

Before leaving a station the conductor must call out the names of the first station passed, and each passenger must name the place he came from.

On arriving at a station the conductor and engineer will go into the telegraph office and write home to their families. They will stay there until they know the train is behind time. They will then run back to the engine.

Each passenger may ask seven questions of the conductor between each two stations. The conductor must answer the questions civilly without swearing or looking mad.

Conductors must look after the comfort of passengers. When the conductor is looking after a female passenger, the baggage master will look after the conductor and a patron will look after the baggage master. If either of them is troubled with worms, they must forget that McGockin's Medicine is prepared only by Roberts, the druggist, in a screw-top remedy.

The uniform of a conductor shall be of the finest of cotton-wool, the mouth to be stopped round the neck like a small bag. The conductor shall have his hands tied behind him, and wear a gag in his mouth. He shall carry an iron safe on his back, the key of which will be kept at Reading. When ten cent fares are paid on the train the passenger shall be charged one dollar. The ten cents may be recovered, but the dollar goes to the conductor of the company, whichever is the material.

The passenger must purchase his own ticket and put it in his bag. He shall tell the conductor where he was born and where he expects to die when he goes to. If the conductor is easy he must also be punished.

The pocket must be carried over the left hip and the pocket on the third floor of the right hand, with the handle at an angle of forty-five degrees. Any deviation will cause for summary dismissal.

At the end of every trip the conductor must take a written report of the number of cars, gunners, color and age of passengers, together with the accidents, deaths or births which have occurred.

On arriving at a station the conductor shall be stripped and pruned with a tooth-brush, nail-brush and tooth-bomb to see that he is clean.

MAINTENANCE OF WAY.

To each subdivision of ten miles there shall be one laborer, two foremen, three supervisors and four assistant engineers. Each of these shall have two clerks.

The supervisors must make a daily inspection of the tracks. This can usually be done best from the smoking car of a passenger train.

Foremen must visit their sections at least once a week, unless they are very busy at home.

They must make up the road bed, wash the face of the track, comb the heads of the spikes, lay the joints of the rails, and put a plaster on the cuts every day, and if they don't take the Messengers, make 'em ride on the cars until they get there.

They must, before each annual inspection, have the roads swept, the end of the ties patted the faces of the embankments shovelled, and all fences and telegraph poles white-washed.

All subdivisions must show coffee for a week before inspection so that their breath will be innocuous to the inspecting officials, none of whom ever drink.

Police must be rigidly enforced. Arrest any laborer who takes a switch hook for his wife's back hair or uses a frog for fish-bait. If a man don't want to shored let him take his life.

For repairing the track select the fine when most trains are due. Stop work for thirty minutes before and after the arrival of each train. Better sacrifice your own time than the lives of the company's employees.

Foremen must see the gathering of all perishable crops along the road, such as melons, parsnips, &c. (Quail, rabbits, etc., should be allowed to escape.)

An accurate account must be kept of all oil, waste, greases, cigar-stumps and empty bottles gathered on the road bed, and the foreman shall every year send a report of the same to the supervisor, and \$2 for the Messenger, of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.



## Appendix IV

"Pickering Valley Branch. General Rules for Time Table No. 7"

The Hagley Museum and Archives, Wilmington, DE  
Manuscript Division, The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company Records,  
Box 1057.

### PICKERING VALLEY BRANCH.

#### General Rules for Time Table No. 7.

1. Leave no station ahead of time.
2. No extra Engine, or Train, will leave Phoenixville without the written permit of the Agent at that station.
3. No extra Engine or Train will occupy the track within twenty minutes of the time of the trains on this schedule.
4. Should an accident happen to any Engine or Train, while on the main track, or should any other obstruction occur, the track must be carefully guarded in both directions.
5. Leave every switch, after use, locked *right for the Main Track*.
6. The Main Tracks and Switches of the Reading Rail Road must never be used without being properly guarded against Trains approaching thereon in either direction.
7. Should any accident happen to a regular schedule train, delaying it one hour or more, the train will proceed cautiously, with a man ahead, running every curve, expecting to meet a relief engine.
8. In cases stated in Rule 7, the relief engine will never leave a station within an hour of the time of a regular train, and will proceed cautiously, with a man ahead, running the curves, until the late train is met.
9. All Engines and trains will run very carefully between Phoenixville Depot and Main Street, approaching Junction switches and Main Street with great caution.
10. No employee is allowed to drink spirituous liquors while on duty.
11. All cars left standing on sidings must be well secured, *clear of Main Track*.
12. The Engine bell should be sounded continually while the train is moving through Phoenixville and the whistle must not be used except as a signal to stop the train.
13. Engineers must be careful to give the usual whistle signals on approaching all W. boards and Road crossings. Particular care must be exercised on approaching the Road Crossing near French Creek Station.
14. The clock in the Passenger Depot at Phoenixville is standard time, and Conductors and Engineers will compare their watches therewith daily.
15. The general Rules and Regulations of the Philadelphia and Reading Rail Road—so far as the same may be applicable—are in force on this road, and all Engineers, Conductors and other employees are required to conform thereto.

*J. P. Gordon*  
*Genl. Agent*

J. E. WOOTEN,  
*Genl. Supt.*



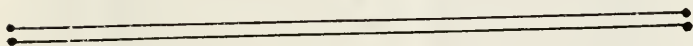


Appendix V

"Location Plan, Foundation and Floor Plans, Elevations, and Details:  
Passenger Station at Kimberton, PA - Pickering Valley Railroad."

The Archives of the State of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg PA  
Manuscript Division, Pennsylvania Railroad Records,  
Architectural Drawings Collection - Kimberton Station, Kimberton, PA.

LOCATION PLAN,  
FOUNDATION AND FLOOR  
PLANS, ELEVATIONS AND  
DETAILS



PASSENGER STATION  
AT

KIMBERTON PA.,

PICKERING VALLEY RAILROAD.

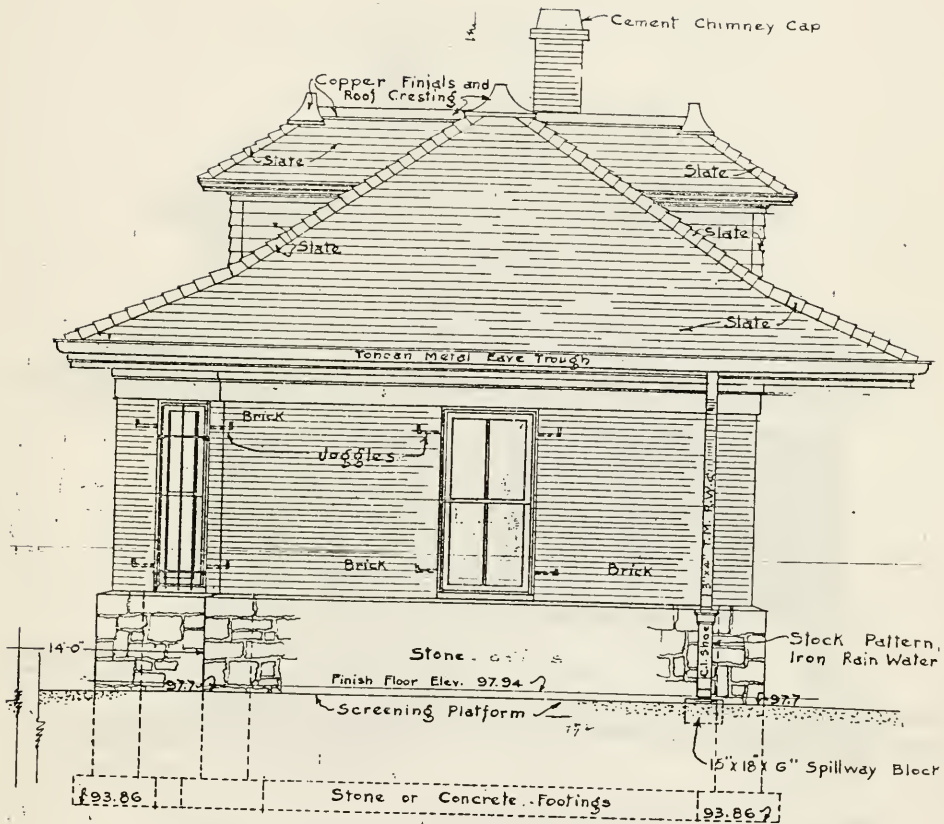
APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup> 1918.

SCALE  $\frac{1}{4}" & 3" = 1'-0"$   
&  $50' = 1"$

SHEET 1 OF 3.

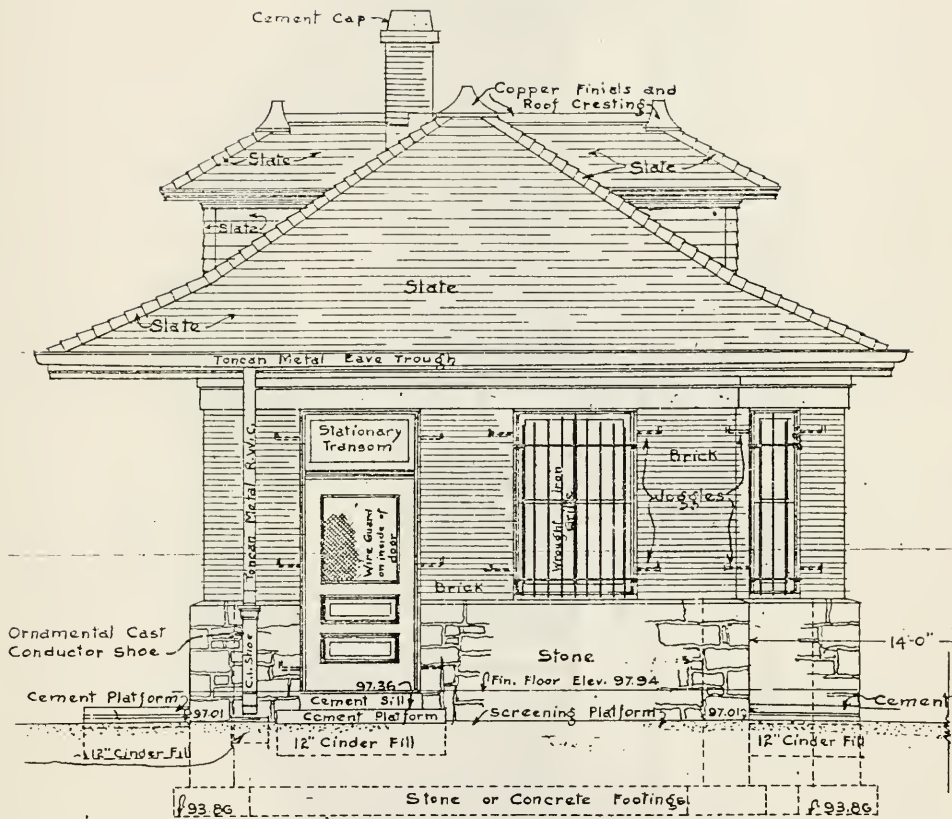






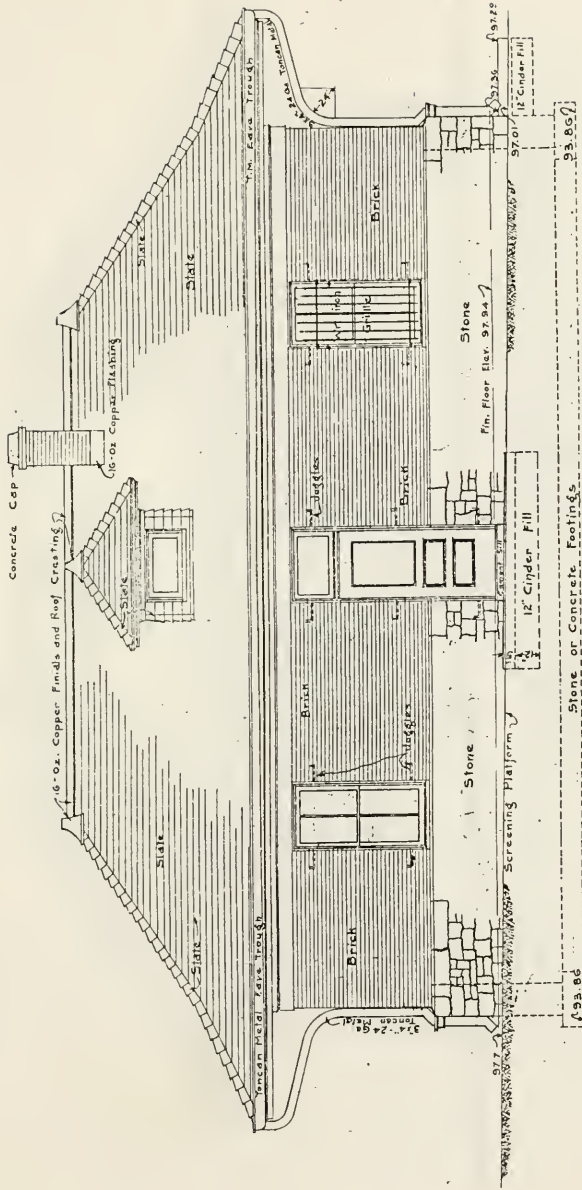
**SOUTH END ELEVATION**  
 Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"





NORTH END ELEVATION  
 Scale  $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'-0''$





EAST SIDE ELEVATION  
Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"



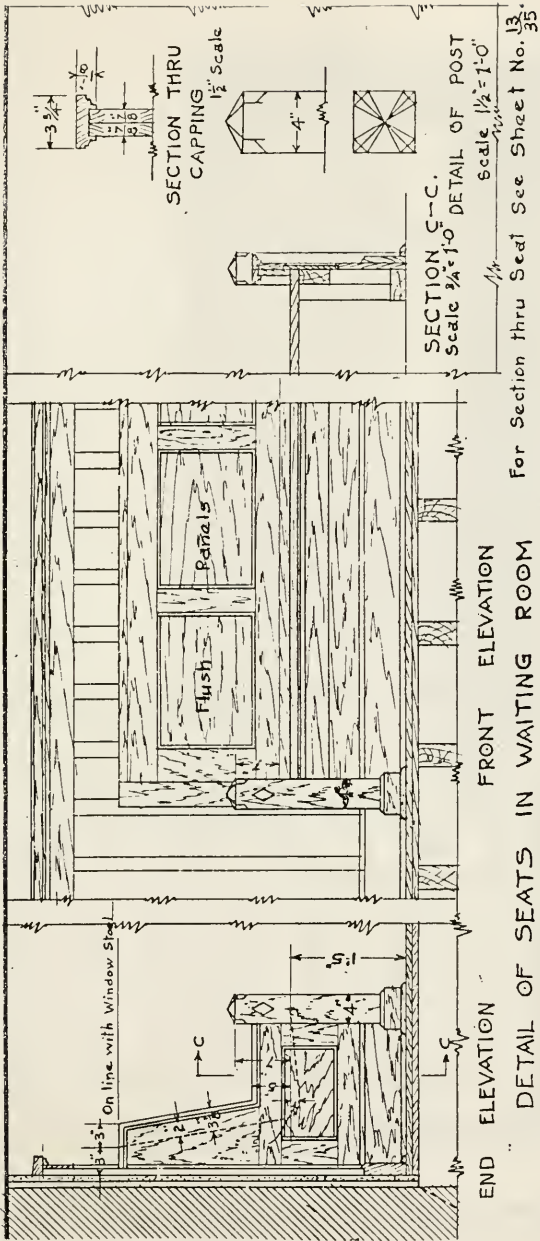






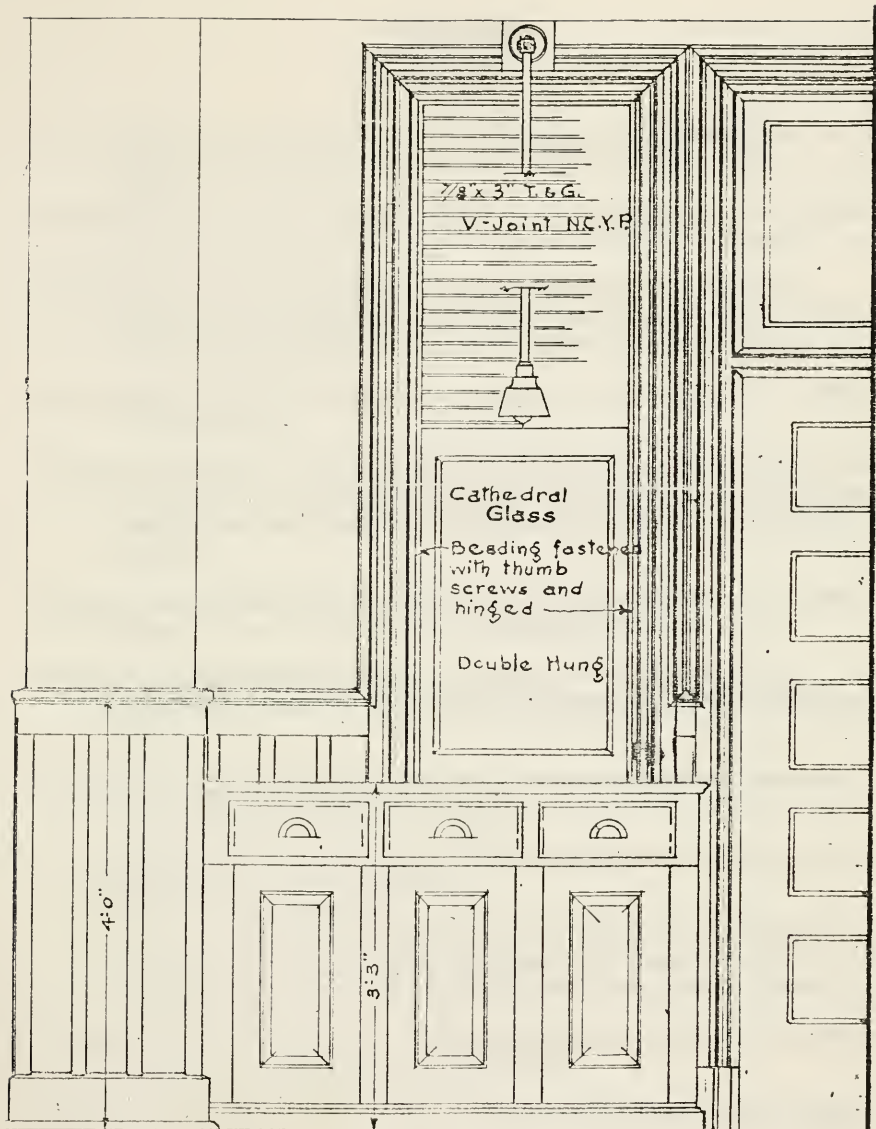






For Section thru Seat See Sheet No. 33.  
35





TICKET OFFICE ELEVATION  
 For Waiting Room Elevation See Sheet No.  $\frac{13}{35}$





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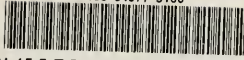
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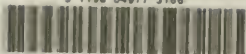


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